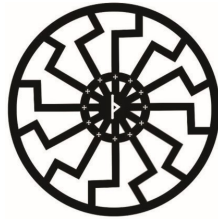


Andreas J. Voigt

The National Dilogy



The Last
Patriot

&

Uprising in
Global Conflagration

Two Novels

~ Praise and Thanks ~

I dedicate these literary works of a political dissident and free spirit,
which I understand neither as a confession nor as an accusation,
but as an encouragement,

to my beloved family and my wonderful children,
as well as to my praiseworthy friends and comrades,

who, despite my audacious lifestyle, always believed in me and
always stood by me. My deep and eternal gratitude goes to
these dignified chosen few, to whom I bow.

The National Dilogy

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Der Nationale Doppelroman

**Original editing, proofreading, inspiration and
angelic foresight (2009):**

~ Dr. Jana L. ~
~ Dipl.-Wi.Jur. Kati H. ~

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“He who writes in blood and aphorisms does not want to be read, but rather learned by heart.”

Friedrich Nietzsche

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The Last Patriot

***“The Polish Jew Rosa Luxemburg proclaimed:
‘Freedom is always freedom for those who think
differently’! Today we, who are loyal to the
fatherland, are these dissidents—the measure of our
freedom must and will also be the measure of the
legitimacy of the Federal Republic of Germany’s
constitutional state!”***

The Prelude

At midnight, the secret branch office of the Special Task Force (SEK) of the Berlin STATE CRIMINAL POLICE OFFICE (LKA) had been alarmed and put on standby. It seemed to be a promising prospect for the SEK. Several tactical teams arrived at 2:00 a.m., but first went to prepared rest rooms. Since 4:00 a.m., everyone had been waiting tensely in the operations room.

Müller saw an elite police officer taking his last ration of pain-killers. They all had them with them. With these and the obligatory caffeine tablets, one could endure for days and eliminate any pain or tiredness—an unavoidable necessity, even if it came at the expense of one's own health, which was grievously and inevitably felt with every new operation. He hoped that the *dance* would finally begin, because he was also starting to get a headache.

"Shit! Watch out, Mülli!"

Müller looked puzzled at his colleague Schmidtbauer, dressed in black, who was just dusting off his combat trousers with his left hand. Schmidtbauer's right hand never strayed far from his hip holster, in which today—instead of his usual SIG SAUER pistole—he had his new HECKLER & KOCH P2000 with a spare magazine. The weapon was still "unofficial" and at the beginning of the three-year test phase, but the Berlin SEK was also suitable for this.

"Damn it, I really hate it," said Schmidtbauer with a slight wink to Müller, "when your cigarette ash flies onto my clean trousers. That ugly light stain could give me away in the dark."

In the briefing room of the assault forces, the thirty or so men dressed in black and camouflage laughed quietly. Except for the four precision marksmen of the PSK—these sniper commandos never laughed.

"Hey, if I ruined your crease, I'm sorry. Just take off your pants and throw them on the floor. I'll trample over them until they're smooth again," said Müller, turning his blue-gray eyes upwards mockingly.

"You and your damn smoking ... if that happens again, I'll trample on you until *you're* smooth ... well, or at least until your cancer stick is gone!" said Schmidtbauer mischievously and with a little feigned anger.

Again, there was general laughter in the room. These two young-looking swashbucklers always managed to ease the obvious nervousness before a mission.

"I need at least a pack before a kill, you know that, Schmidti," said the *Polizeihauptmeister* with a grin, "and by the way, I'll smoke when I feel like it. We still live in a democracy, colleague—*still ...*"

Schmidtbauer slowly stood up and placed both fists threateningly on the small green-lacquered table full of coffee cups, ashtrays, flashlights, maps and mags.

"I'll be glad when you're masked and have to keep your mouth shut, Müller. ... and now put out that damn Bolshevik coffin nail, you know-it-all!" Schmidtbauer's deep bass was very convincing, and given his almost two-meter height and his considerable width, which also seemed to be around that size, Müller agreed with a malicious grin crushed his unfiltered cigarette in the ash-can in front of him.

Müller knew Schmidtbauer well—they got along well. They had been together during police training and later on standby duty. Even then, the idea of having to go on patrol was the worst night-

mare for them: in that idiotic and, above all, ugly uniform; friend and helper; with the law book under their arm; their heads full of regulations; showering the little and good ones with parking tickets, but avoiding the gangs of foreigners for fear of their propensity to violence; more duties than rights; and the great fear of having to use weapons every day ... No, that was not the type of service they coveted. They wanted to be part of the elite from the start. They wanted to fight the criminals with their own weapons: iron force combined with superior technical means that most citizens had no idea about. This was the only way to successfully defeat the major criminals. This was the only way to ensure that good prevailed. The hazard allowance, a measly two hundred *Deutsche Mark*, was a joke, but money was no object to them. Without an unconditional conviction, even two thousand D-Marks would make no difference.

He and Schmidtbauer have always loved fighting, especially fistfights and hand-to-hand combat. Müller often wondered what would have happened to him if he had not chosen to be a police officer. He knew his tendency towards violence. He passed his secondary school leaving exams with ease, but that was where his ambition ended. He preferred to play football or go on trips with his crew in the evenings.

Now, at five in the morning, Müller was sitting in this large, sparsely furnished room. The smell of cigarettes, hot coffee, gun oil and sweat filled his nose. It was quite warm under his suit. The thermal underwear and stab-proof chain mail did not allow for the slightest cooling, but they never knew how long they might have to endure in the cold before the order to storm would be given. His bullet-resistant Sitek vest was actually light, but still uncomfortable. Equipment was chosen depending on the reconnaissance situation, but on this mission the advance information was so sparse and vague that the order was to be prepared for anything, absolutely anything.

His beloved silenced HK MP5 was attached to two quick-release carbines on his chest strap, above the tactical vest with his personal equipment. A strong pull with both hands and the submachine gun was in his hands with no problem. Even the adhesive tape used to attach the second magazine to the one already inserted had the same pattern as his own camouflage uniform. The large patch with the Berlin coat of arms on the sleeve bothered him because he wanted to see but not be seen.

In contrast to most of his colleagues, Müller was reluctant to use his Heckler & Koch pistol HK P7. He would have preferred to have the ultimate, short submachine gun MP5K with him as well: the best weapon in the world for house-to-house fighting and close combat—*Made in Germany*, of course. He had his balaclava in the left side pocket of his trousers—it was dangerous to be one of the best, and above all it was dangerous to be recognized—and above it was the control for the new digital radio. His titanium helmet, with integrated radio set, polycarbonate visor and active hearing protection, lay at his feet, even though Müller categorically doubted whether it would serve its purpose in an emergency. If a helmet was hit by large-caliber NATO ammunition, you hardly stood a chance.

Of course there were also weaknesses in training and equipment, as had been tragically experienced in Berlin on occasion. No one spoke about shortcomings, especially not to outsiders. But it was clear to the young *Polizeihauptmeister* Müller, as it was to the other SEK teams: If a criminal was really determined, was not intimidated by their martial behavior and, to top it all off, was not afraid of death, then anything was possible, anything ...

Müller was curious to see what the day would bring, but he didn't want to know too much. He preferred simple, clear orders. An order was an order, even if you couldn't get enough "Schnaps" afterwards. The legal and often political decisions should be

made by others, and he certainly wouldn't rack his brains over that. Anyone in the SEK/PSK who started to think and weigh up the justification for an operation was in the wrong place. Müller had decided to reconcile his life with the requirements of police duty, without any ifs or buts.

The moral was very simple: "good against evil"—and Müller was certain; he and his comrades were the good guys.

"I was always only concerned with Germany, never with money, reputation or my occasionally fickle comrades. In times, when I was to be shattered by disappointment, I always reminded myself that it is only about the glorious fatherland!"

Assault at Dawn

It was a cold December morning just before new millennium, but the silence of the nearby forest was as deceptive as the purity of the unexpected, early snow. The situation in the soulless room was very critical. Two men looked at each other intently. Anger met fear, friendship turned to bitter enmity, and affection turned to hatred.

"I'm not a traitor! Really ...!"

"Oh, no? I see it quite differently ... if you don't mind!" added the angry prosecutor sarcastically.

"Please, believe me ..."

"What am I supposed to do? You've been sitting in the damn tub for over five hours telling me this nonsense, but I don't believe a word you say. We both know the truth."

"Damn it, I didn't lie. I've always been faithful to you. You have my word of honor!"

"Your word of honor? When I hear that, you ...!" his opponent mocked smugly. "We'll find out what your word of honor is worth—no matter how long it takes. I've got enough time, believe me! In fifteen minutes, at exactly quarter past five, I'll be back, and then we'll start again. You can look forward to it ...!"

Thorsten Schwamm, completely intimidated, watched Sven Hardenberg walk out. He was at the end of his strength. With the last glance he managed to catch at the impressive figure, who had just turned away from him with a disdainful attitude, he noticed that Hardenberg was no longer carrying his pistol. Schwamm was very aware that his opponent did not need this weapon either, it was unnecessary, because Hardenberg himself was a weapon—dangerous, precise and, only when absolutely necessary, merciless!

The head of the BFP, *BUND FREIER PATRIOTEN* (LEAGUE OF FREE PATRIOTS), slammed the door of the large bathroom behind him and left Schwamm completely naked in a marble-tiled corner tub. The water was ice cold. It had been for hours. Schwamm had orders to drain it again and again and then refill it with cold water—a measure, as he also knew, that would quickly drain his body of energy and at the same time ensure the goal of sleep deprivation. Despite this knowledge and his rapidly waning strength, he stoically carried out the order, over and over again. He didn't dare get out—Hardenberg would notice, sense it, he was sure of that.

He had not been beaten. Hardenberg had not even touched him, but the fear remained. This was one of the many things that he himself had witnessed countless times and that he admired about his former leader and friend: Hardenberg was capable of unsettling a man, even intimidating him completely, without even having touched him once, just by his mere presence and a few appropriate words. Knowing this, Schwamm looked towards the window. It was too small, not big enough to get out of, even if he had, the fall from the roof would have been fatal. It was still dark outside and he prayed that the daylight of the new morning would finally put an end to the nightmare of the last few hours.

To escape the constant weakening of his body and mind, he reflected on the events of the past hours:

The previous day had gone completely wrong. A big meeting was supposed to take place at 6 p.m. For the first time, Schwamm had received a concrete tip-off. The secret police of the SfS or *SONDERABTEILUNG FÜR STAATSSCHUTZ* (SPECIAL DEPARTMENT FOR STATE SECURITY) in Berlin was putting pressure on him, wanting to finally have usable evidence against the BFP. They also didn't want to let him drop out, although Schwamm had often asked for it. Why Hardenberg had invited him to the meeting was a mystery to him,

but he was pleased nonetheless. He was to act as chauffeur and was instructed to pick up the leader at his main residence at the lake Müggelsee at 4 p.m. sharp, two hours before the scheduled time. Two members of the league's security team would be escorting him. Schwamm's superiors actually wanted to follow the vehicle, but Hardenberg and his men were experienced. Confidential informant Schwamm feared discovery and therefore declined the offer of a follow-up. His BMW was then fitted with a tracking device. Unfortunately, Hardenberg decided at the last minute to use his own RANGE ROVER with the Hamburg license plate. The electronics of the navigation system were disconnected to prevent tracking. Schwamm, who was driving, would have liked to make a phone call, but his cell phone was taken away from him on the grounds that it was a matter of security at the meeting.

Instead of heading west towards Wannsee, Hardenberg had Schwamm drive to the north of Berlin and ordered him to stop in a well-kept neighborhood on the edge of the Buch district. Hardenberg stated that the meeting location had changed. The men got out and entered an elegant four-story Art Nouveau building. They took the newly installed elevator to the top floor and went into a large, extremely tastefully furnished old apartment. The high walls, the deep windows and the parquet floor made of the best cherry wood confirmed the exquisite impression. Schwamm was very surprised—he did not know this apartment. How Hardenberg's dog got here also remained a mystery.

Even more surprising was the fact that numerous members of the BFP were present. Everyone in the room wore dark three-piece suits with ceremonial ties. Hardenberg's friend and deputy came to take his coat and hang it in the cloakroom. To the left and right of the entrance door were two chairs with high backs. The two short-haired men from the security team, all in black including turtleneck sweaters, sat there in silence. Schwamm did

not dare to ask why they were present. Sven Hardenberg slid pleasantly into the comfortable club chair that seemed to have been waiting for him by the open fireplace. One of those present brought the humidor from which Hardenberg and the other men were to choose a cigar. Schwamm knew this ritual, which was intended to contribute to the emotional connection to the fellowship. He also sat down and smoked dutifully but without enjoyment, while two young ladies he did not know busily brewed coffee in the kitchen and unpacked pastries they had brought with them. The modern and high-quality fitted kitchen seemed to be poorly equipped, as if social events were not planned. The two blonde medical students were introduced to him as Martina and Petra. After the coffee was served, the extremely attractive members of a befriended Berlin maidens' club said an informal goodbye, gave the boss a warm farewell kiss and were accompanied downstairs by a board member.

The atmosphere seemed tense. Nevertheless, they chatted for two hours and joked now and then. Finally Hardenberg spoke—and the group remained silent, full of deliberation. Hardenberg announced that the conference at Wannsee would not take place because the people who were planning to attend had learned that there was a security breach in the BFP. A source had told the authorities that a meeting would take place. The dismay in the room was palpable. The blood drained from Schwamm's face and he turned ashen. He had the unmistakable feeling that everyone was watching him. He wanted to jump up and run, but feared that his legs would give way. He also knew that the escape attempt would end when he got to the men from the security team, who were still sitting next to the apartment exit. He had been able to see now and again what skills these warriors had. But Hardenberg did not mention him personally. Was he exposed? Were they playing a game with him? He was in danger of losing consciousness. His nerves were frayed; he would not be able to endure this unbearable uncertainty much longer. A long,

lively discussion broke out. When the doorbell rang late in the evening, Schwamm almost collapsed. Hardenberg rubbed his hands with a smile, full of anticipation: The food had arrived and was being served straight away by the delivery service.

The large table in the dining room was carefully set, and then Hardenberg invited everyone to enjoy the first-class dishes. Schwamm now dared to ask if he could make a phone call. Sven Hardenberg saw the small beads of sweat on Schwamm's forehead and sensed his unease and uncertainty. He deliberately ignored them and refused his request in a jovial manner. They were expecting an important call. Cell phones were of course to be switched off and the batteries were to be kept outside the respective device.

After the evening meal, cigars and port wine, FONSECA VINTAGE PORT 2000, were served. Hardenberg loosened his tie and the others did the same. Meanwhile, the topic became more serious. The members speculated about who the renegade might be. They speculated through all the possibilities and checked the members' references again. They also ended up with Schwamm, who had now realized that they knew about his betrayal—knew everything.

The room suddenly seemed much too small, a chill ran down his spine and he had to withstand the piercing gaze of Frank Hühn, who was examining him particularly intently, with the last of his dignity. Schwamm felt Hühn's large brown eyes piercing his very being. They had been schoolmates in Munich, graduating from Gymnasium in the same year. Hühn was not only deputy chairman, but also intelligence officer, and as such head of the BFP's information gathering department. He had vouched for him. Schwamm was deeply ashamed—in the certain knowledge that he had disappointed him, yes, that he had disappointed everyone.

This cruel game, as Schwamm felt it, lasted until midnight. Suddenly Hardenberg stood up and said goodbye to the assembled members. Schwamm felt powerless. Since no one said goodbye to him, he finally knew that he was delivered up. The two bodyguards were also ordered to leave by Hardenberg; an order that they only carried out reluctantly, since they were primarily responsible for the personal safety of the BFP chairman. After all the men present had left the apartment, Hardenberg locked the door and pushed the security bolt. Schwamm stood in the hallway and eyed the hopeless situation. Hardenberg turned around, took his GLOCK out from under his jacket, loaded it, released the hammer and put it back in his pocket without even a glancing at Schwamm.

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Hans Rittmeister walked with firm steps into the briefing room in the basement of the secret branch office of the Special Task Force. His LOWA boots, however, were silent. It was just after five o'clock. He looked around the room quickly but nonetheless carefully and recognized the same faces—alert, eager and full of energy. He understood this situation well, as he himself had been one of these faces many years ago. He hung his black leather jacket, which he always wore on missions in winter, on the coat rack provided.

“Good morning, men, please take a seat, we’re about to start!”

Rittmeister did not want to leave any doubts about his authority. He was not a tall man, rather average, measuring only 1.79 m and weighing 78 kg, but without a gram of excess fat—and that at 51 years old. You could see that he did sport, a lot of sport. His bright eyes radiated self-consciousness and confidence. Rittmeister knew his job inside and out, and he let everyone know that. His short hair and neat side parting was flawless. His face bore the signs of time. But he hid most of his scars inside. His

striking head turned leisurely from side to side as he looked at the tall and athletic young policemen who still believed in the positive things in this world.

They were as he once was. They did not yet doubt what they were doing. They did not yet ask philosophical questions. They did not ask *why*—they were following orders. For whom and for what purpose was secondary. Yes, they were excellently trained and they were obedient. They believed that they had the morality of civilization on their side, always "In the name of the people." For them there was no ethical conflict.

These fortunate children did not toss and turn at night, did not wake up drenched in sweat to find that they had been betrayed, that they had lost their values and thus their honor and pride—or rather, sold them. For them it was still a game, and for Hans Rittmeister too, over and over again. That was the only way he could endure it all. That was the only way he could drive to the agency office in the morning, and that was the only way he could lead them now. But first he had to lie to them—as he often did.

The police officers now sat in a closed front and waited for what would happen next. Rittmeister walked along the side corridor to the front along the long wall. The front wall was almost completely covered with numerous observation photographs, a screen and a large, detailed map of northern Berlin—the building complex itself, the location of which was unknown to the public, was marked with a yellow pin, the three possible target objects each with a red pin. The access routes and tactically relevant events on site were again highlighted with a highlighter.

Rittmeister took his position next to the overhead projector and looked into the tense and expectant faces of the special unit. The intelligence officer and current *protector* of the constitution pondered on his past. When he was their age, he had already

spied on Soviet military installations. Those were still assignments. Back then, people knew what they were doing and why. German intelligence still had a reputation—a good one. The Cold War was a real war and not child's play like today. What has happened to this state? Rittmeister could not turn off the schematic questions in his head, as he had recently had to realize more often. Classic repression no longer worked.

The government declared half-children to be enemies of the state just so that they could hunt someone down. And why all this? Just because some young people evade almost 60 years of re-education and subconscious collective guilt by singing the national anthem with pride and innocent enthusiasm? Because these young idealists do not automatically see the German soldier as a criminal or a barbarian? Because these young dreamers look at the entire two thousand year old Germanic-German history and not just the history of the "twelve dark years" between 1933 and 1945, which are abused to create historical German collective guilt for all times?

Rittmeister wanted to stop mulling over the same thoughts over and over again, which ultimately only led to the same conclusion over and over again. He wanted to concentrate on the essentials; he had to stop, because he felt powerless against the spirit of the times, the *Zeitgeist*. What else should he do? Fight the "freest state ever on German soil"? A "democracy" in which books, music, political parties, clubs, even concepts, words, combinations of numbers and, most likely, soon, thoughts are banned every day? Or should he, as before, remove the critics of the system without scruples? Deep down, he had long noticed that he lacked the strength for resistance—and above all, the confidence. He had simply served this state loyally for too long. The youth had to step in now, because it was urgent. Rittmeister asked himself again what he was actually doing here and shook his head in

slight disgust. He had a very bitter taste in his mouth, which he would have liked to blame on the stale coffee.

"Herr Rittmeister?" came the gentle but firm call from the door. Rittmeister looked leisurely towards the entrance. A neat secretary in her prime smiled at him.

"Yes, Heidi?" he replied inquiringly, smiling as well. She was the highly respected right-hand assistant of the head of the STATE CRIMINAL POLICE OFFICE in Berlin. Rittmeister and she knew each other well, very well, because she had been making him happy for years on many a lonely night in Berlin.

"The boss asks for about ten minutes of patience, he is still waiting for a report from the reconnaissance unit in front of target object three, and the public prosecutor has not arrived yet either," said Adelheid "Heidi" Freytag and winked at him, unnoticed by the others.

"Thank you, Heidi, he doesn't have to hurry. Patience is the unpaid strength of every civil servant! Above all, I stress *unpaid!*" said Rittmeister with a broad smile, which was readily returned by her, which certainly had not gone unnoticed, judging by the grins of some of the officers.

"Very well, gentlemen, you heard it," said Rittmeister, as he took a seat at the operations command table, "please check your equipment again and familiarize yourself with the map and its highlights. It can only be a matter of hours," he added smugly.

Now everyone was waiting for the "*Chef*": Justus Birkle. A 55-year-old Swabian in the German capital, who had brought order to the chaos of the LKA Berlin in just two years. Birkle and Rittmeister were friends, old friends. Birkle was the only one in this department who knew his true identity. The name "Hans Rittmeister" was part of his legend, which he had often had to adopt in his professional life. They had worked together at the BND, the BUNDESNACHRICHTENDIENST: Birkle, after studying law, and Rittmeister, whose parents came from the Eastern Zone and

had excellent connections there, were recruited directly from the Bundeswehr's parachute troops, the *Fallschirmjäger*, during his time as a conscript. Neither the death of his parents nor the entreaties of his then wife could stop him from achieving his goals.

The two old friends first met in the 1970s during training with the German foreign intelligence service, although they attended various courses. Birkle then went to Department III, *Evaluation*, while Rittmeister only wanted to work in the field, Department I, *Procurement*, full of adventure and fame. Birkle quickly managed to climb the hierarchy and ended up as head of a subdivision in Department IV, *Central Tasks*, while Rittmeister made a name for himself abroad, first as an operational agent and later as a paramilitary operations officer, who was only whispered with respect within the silent walls.

The problems began at the end of the 1980s. Rittmeister returned from a failed mission in the Middle East. MOSSAD agents had once again interfered. Rittmeister tried to get his superiors to call the Israelis back, but the political leadership of the BND was far from the self-confident and independent leadership of the GEHLEN ORGANISATION.

The "*Org.-Chef*" Reinhard Gehlen, a German officer and patriot who in 1953 commissioned Otto Skorzeny to work as an instructor in the establishment of a secret service in Egypt, would never have allowed the American secret service NSA, the NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY, to use ECHOLON to spy on their *friends* militarily and, above all, economically in their own country. MOSSAD, CIA, CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, and other foreign intelligence services had permanently established themselves in Pullach, the BND headquarters on the southern outskirts of Munich and the seat of the most exclusive men's club in Europe.

They did not want to or could not say no to the Israelis in particular. Rittmeister's superior seemed to be at their mercy and thus undermined the success of many BND operations in the Near and Middle East. During this time, the BND had also lost its good reputation for its neutrality and objectivity. Since the "Foertsch affair" in 1998 at the latest, it was considered nothing more than a joke on the part of the secret services, not least because the BUNDESNACHRICHTENDIENST, apparently for cost reasons, had to rely more on theorists and computer scientists instead of recruiting and managing agents on the ground.

The actual duty, the main directive of the secret services, was to end wars on a political level before they start on the battlefield. The operation, which Rittmeister had been preparing for over a year and which could have made a decisive contribution to the peace process, had failed. What's more, his best agent, his friend, a Palestinian officer, was killed. The remaining agents that Rittmeister had recruited and led were kidnapped, tortured and murdered by the Israelis. Rittmeister returned to Germany completely disillusioned, threw the requested operation file at the feet of his head of office and announced that he would "never work with this pack again!" The MOSSAD and CIA liaison officers, who were allowed to witness the scenario, put pressure on the BND Vice President, who was also present. Hans Rittmeister had become a risk and had to go, preferably for good. Many at the FEDERAL INTELLIGENCE SERVICE (BND) were accordingly dismayed. Rittmeister received support, especially from Birkle, who by now had a lot of influence, but also from the FEDERAL CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE (*BUNDESKANZLERAMT*), to which the BND was subordinate.

Rittmeister, on the other hand, was completely lacking in diplomatic skills, which was actually what made him stand out. He refused to kowtow as demanded and was subsequently given leave of absence, while Birkle and others tried to smooth things over with the help of long-standing relationships. Rittmeister's

services were so valuable that even the BUNDESKANZLERAMT refused to let him go, probably also because the Soviet secret service KGB was openly trying to recruit the unemployed agent. A new legend with excellent references was created for him and he was then offered a suitable position in the higher service at the BfV, the FEDERAL OFFICE FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE CONSTITUTION, Germany's federal domestic intelligence agency, in Cologne. Rittmeister was not reluctant to go, and of course he took the personal dossiers of politicians and business leaders that he had created for possible emergencies from his safe.

Hans Rittmeister began his new post at the end of 1993 and took over the leadership of the newly founded "Operational Department East" within Department II, *Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism*, of the BfV. As a former agent of the BUNDESNACHRICHTENDIENST, Rittmeister was very familiar with cover-up tactics and was able to turn a barely existent and poorly organized *enemy* into the greatest possible source of acute danger for the media. There was plenty of money. Nothing was too expensive for the reunified Germany to prove to the domestic public and to foreign countries that the newly ignited "Nazi threat" was being fought with the utmost severity in the country of "perpetrators and gravediggers." It did not take long for Hans Rittmeister to see through the entire fraud.

Justus Birkle initially stayed with the BUNDESNACHRICHTENDIENST, even though he had become increasingly critical. He was not alone, and many of his colleagues shared his concerns. The BND had fewer and fewer resources at its disposal. More and more tasks were being demanded of them. And above all, the political orientation was being defined more and more strictly. Certain foreign services had *carte blanche*. The German economy was shamelessly spied on. Global thinking was demanded of post-war Germans, while the others only pursued national interests. The Germans were good as long as they did exactly what the world

leaders expected of them. Udo Ulfkotte's book "Verschlußsache BND" (1997) had, like other literary revelations, only scratched the surface.

The Israelis waged a bitter war against any opposition, and the enemy was always the one who expressed even the slightest criticism of Zionism. State terror, regardless of its origin, was not only unbearable for Birkle, because the BND supported it indirectly with its policy of sharing information, but also by procuring weapons of war for foreign powers through German channels. When, for example, the MOSSAD increased its action against nationalistic groups within Germany in the early 1990s, Birkle could no longer justify this to himself. If there was peace for a while, swastikas suddenly appeared again on gravestones or house walls—a tried and tested tactical incitement.

Asylum seekers' homes also went up in flames, and Birkle knew exactly, too well—as horrific and condemnable as the actual crimes were—that the naive young Germans who had been arrested were not always the perpetrators. But he would remain silent forever. Not out of fear for himself or his family, but out of fear for his beloved fatherland, because if the people found out even half of what he knew, the country's state of peace would be in danger. Justus Birkle resigned from the BUNDESNACHRICHTEN-DIENST, took his loyal secretary Adelheid Freytag with him and became director of the LKA in Berlin.

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Thorsten Schwamm had been sitting in this elegant tub since the witching hour, and in the last hours of his agony he wondered what the water would look like when it was red with his blood. He knew that his former friend would soon return—and he was more afraid than ever before. The door to the bathroom flew open again.

"Alright, you little pissant, your fifteen minutes are up. Have you decided?" Sven Hardenberg, without paying any attention to Schwamm's reply, began to dip towels into the freshly filled water of the sink.

"I really don't want to, but I'm going to hurt you now, boy, hurt you badly. The wet towels won't leave any marks, but you'll wish you had talked." He had learned this interrogation method, and even more brutal practices, from the British anti-terrorist command, the SPECIAL AIR SERVICE, which had offered interrogation courses for elite soldiers of the German army at the renowned ILRRPS, the INTERNATIONAL LONG RANGE RECONNAISSANCE PATROL SCHOOL in Weingarten, among other places.

Schwamm inevitably began to sob and groan, he could no longer hold it back. His psyche had given up. At that moment the phone rang. Hardenberg was surprised, as he had ordered absolute radio silence. Only the executive members of the BFP had this number, only they knew about this *safe* apartment. He looked at his chronometer: It was exactly 5:25 a.m.

"Oh, it seems you have been given a reprieve, but certainly not for long—I promise!" said Hardenberg and went out towards the study, where all the means of communication were located.

"Yes, please!"

"Mr. Hardenberg?" Silence. "You don't know me," said the distinguished female voice, "but your apartment will be stormed in the next two hours. Don't do anything to the traitor! Don't throw your life away, because there is a future greater than anything you have known up to now. Endure whatever may come your way and the reward will exceed your wildest imagination. Long live Germany!"

Hardenberg didn't have a chance to reply. When he realized that the call had ended, he slowly lowered the receiver. Thoughts were racing around in his head, but he was able to organize them in no time at all—a skill he had developed to precision over the years. He was undecided, but he had listened carefully. It was not

the first time he had received such a call—but never so short-notice and inescapable. Was it a warning? A threat? A trap? It didn't matter, he always had to be prepared for all eventualities and he would face any challenges appropriately.

Hardenberg ripped open the bathroom door, everything had to happen quickly now. Schwamm backed away as Hardenberg approached him. He had put his gun back in his waistband.

"Come on, you rat, get out now! I'm sick of waiting." Schwamm tried to get up, but he couldn't.

"Are you kidding me, you miserable denouncer?" Hardenberg reached out and slapped Schwamm, who fell back into the big tub and collapsed, crying.

"I'll tell you everything, please, I'll tell you everything! Shit, I can't bear it anymore and I don't want to anymore ..." moaned Schwamm.

"Stop whining and take it like a man!"

Hardenberg spat contemptuously into the yellowish water and held out his hand to Schwamm, who then got out. "Dry off, get dressed and go to the study! If you try to escape, I'll shoot you like a mangy dog!" said Hardenberg coolly and resolutely, but without hostility.

When Schwamm came out of the bathroom and stopped in the hallway, he heard Hardenberg in the kitchen. He glanced briefly toward the entrance door, but all courage had left him. Schwamm went into the study, followed immediately by Hardenberg. He had brought coffee, brandy, and sandwiches.

As he put the tray down, he nodded for Schwamm to help himself. Hardenberg sat down behind the desk and watched as Schwamm hastily drank the first cup of coffee with a shot and devoured two sandwiches. The hours spent in the cold water had clearly taken their toll on him.

Hardenberg did not know how much time he had left. He therefore had to play his greatest trump card immediately, which he wanted to avoid at all costs. He had no choice, so he spread out copies of the highly important minutes of the conversation between Schwamm and his superior on his desk. Schwamm watched him eagerly.

"Thorsten, maybe you can explain to me *why* all this is happening. Start from the beginning and tell me who you really are."

Schwamm, who had internally resigned, was completely disillusioned and now ready to reveal everything.

"I am an agent of the the BfV, the FEDERAL OFFICE FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE CONSTITUTION in Cologne and also of the SfS, the SPECIAL DEPARTMENT FOR STATE SECURITY, which in turn reports to the LKA." It sounded memorized.

"*Agent provocateur* ...!" Hardenberg hissed almost inaudibly, clenching his teeth so hard that his jaw muscles were clearly visible and gave his face an additional hardness that Schwamm and others had already learned to fear. Now he knew for sure that the reports were not fake.

"What?" Schwamm asked disheartened.

"Nothing! I'll ask the questions! Are you an official?"

"No! Not yet."

Hardenberg was surprised. He had thought Schwamm was a common informant who had been bought or blackmailed. But he didn't let his surprise show. His facial expression remained completely unmoved, even though his inner voice kept screaming one word: *TREASON!*

"Then you have committed a criminal offense with the fictitious arms deliveries and many other things that I have read here—not to mention your ethos as a public servant."

"Yes, I know, and I'm really sorry about all of this. I tried so many times to make it clear to those in the special department that the BFP is not a criminal gang, but they didn't want to hear it. They applied pressure and were themselves under pressure to

succeed, which is why the SfS ordered such secret operations. I was always told that I have immunity from prosecution because we somehow have backing from the highest authorities."

"Which agency?"

"They never told me that. They didn't trust me any more than you did."

Hardenberg ignored this simple and entirely correct conclusion.

"And what about the log entries? Did you make up all these stories yourself?"

"Oh! ... No! My reports were usually different. Before reporting, however, I was instructed by my superior undercover agent leader about what I had to say. Protocols were sometimes changed retrospectively before being handed over to the Ministry of the Interior."

"Aha ... so, ... *instructed* ..." Hardenberg was still outwardly completely calm. A fact that surprised him the most, given the confessions he had just heard from Schwamm, a former friend. Hardenberg noticed a passage he had underlined.

"I read here that you asked to be allowed to get out. Were you afraid of being discovered?"

"No, I had other reasons..." said Schwamm, looking shame-faced at the floor.

Hardenberg looked demonstratively at his elegant wristwatch from Glashütte.

"I want you to sit down at the desk and write everything down. Don't leave anything out. Remember that I have the reports. This is your last chance to get out of this unscathed. Do you understand me?" Schwamm nodded dutifully.

"Damn it, you're such a shabby scoundrel!" Hardenberg added disgustedly, stood up and gave up his seat.

"Sven, believe me, I'm really so sorry about everything. You were always good to me ..."

"Shut up! I'm not interested in that at all, you idiot!" Hardenberg shouted, offended, but then added, muffled and exhausted: "You're sorry? It's too late for that. I would appreciate

it if you would start writing and stop babbling—I can't and don't want to hear any more of that. It was a long night, Thorsten, a damn long night ..."

Hardenberg and Schwamm looked at each other briefly and remembered for a moment the harmonious fraternity that once bound them together but was now lost forever. The pain they felt was tragically similar.

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Things were slowly getting restless in the conference room, everyone was waiting for the operation to begin. Hans Rittmeister heard footsteps and looked towards the door. Justus Birkle, his deputy, several LKA criminal investigators, representatives of the SPECIAL DEPARTMENT FOR STATE SECURITY, a liaison officer from the Special Department I/6 of the CUSTOMS CRIMINAL OFFICE, the clerk and, last but not least, the responsible public prosecutor who would lead the house search after the operation, entered at around 5:30 a.m. They were accompanied by a well-known journalist and freelance publicist who had been selected to accompany the operation and who was surprisingly allowed to report on it. In professional circles she was considered beautiful and witty—a rare combination—but also critical of the state executive. Hans Rittmeister had insisted, unflinching and unwavering, that she be called in.

Birkle gave Rittmeister a sign. While he positioned himself in front of the screen, one of Birkle's employees locked the double steel doors and operated a switch above the actual light switch. A quiet humming sound could be heard. The electromagnetic fields were switched on. The room was now secure from outside wire-tapping.

"Good morning, gentlemen—again," said Rittmeister cheerfully, who was once again in control of the situation. "I am of course very sorry that we had to get you out of bed before breakfast, but as the more experienced among you can confirm, it

is best to fight on an empty stomach. Don't let yourself be shot in the stomach, otherwise you would have to miss breakfast in the canteen after the operation—and of course none of us want that, do we?"

General laughter and relaxation filled the windowless room.

"First, about me," began Rittmeister, looking furtively at his friend Birkle, who was sitting to his left at the operational control table, "my name is Hans Rittmeister from the BfV in Cologne. I am currently subordinate to the Federal Ministry of the Interior here in Berlin. Some of you may know me, as this is not my first assignment in this city. As one of my pupils is involved in today's operation, I was asked by Director Birkle, among others, to inform you of our current status. Director Birkle will then inform you of the current status and the procedure."

Rittmeister then switched on the overhead projector and then the slide projector. He took the control in his right hand and pressed it once. The light in the front part of the room went out. He pressed it again. A large image immediately appeared on the screen. It showed a young man, around 31 years old. His torso was athletic, and his short stubble revealed a rough face. No smile, but cold, dull, inscrutable eyes. Rittmeister had never understood how the BfV could recruit such types.

"This man is a colleague of ours. He is, let's say, a *field worker* at the BfV and was infiltrated into right-wing extremist circles as an undercover investigator," said Rittmeister, thus beginning the lecture. "Real name: Schwamm, Thorsten. About a year ago, on our instructions, Schwamm joined the *BUND FREIER PATRIOTEN*, known as the BFP or simply *the Bund*. How he went about it and which contacts he used is not of interest at the moment."

It was a stroke of luck for the BfV. Schwamm had applied for a job in the vehicle fleet and got it. He was not a bright young man, but he was consistent and reliable. When the BFP became more and more influential in the Federal Republic of Germany, every opportunity was sought to infiltrate the League. This was almost impossible because, unlike parties or other public organizations,

the secret society was not transparent. During an internal security check, it was discovered in Schwamm's file that he had attended school in Munich with a member of the Inner Circle of the BFP—a stroke of luck indeed. Rittmeister brought Schwamm into his department and took him under his wing. Contact with his school friend was quickly established, and a short time later, Schwamm was a supporter, a candidate and finally a member and fervent nationalist—the only surprising thing was that he needed neither intensive training nor strong motivation.

Rittmeister now showed the structure of the BFP on the screen with the help of the overhead projector.

"Shortly after the founding, when the executive of *the Bund* quickly and explicitly took its ambitious work to the national political public in order to exert its influence there, we tried to infiltrate a man—but always without success. A year and a half ago, we indirectly came to the realization that the BFP leadership had close contacts with various officials, including those at the STATE CRIMINAL POLICE OFFICES of various federal states. A special unit of the BfV, under my leadership, will soon be entrusted with the task of exposing these moles."

A murmur went through the room. Rittmeister knew that this would work with these young officials. Their beloved corps infiltrated by traitors—that was a thought that generated anger. And this anger prevented them from asking why these renegade civil servants, who had taken an oath of loyalty to the state, had made such a vulgar, albeit patriotic, decision. Damn, how he hated this job sometimes.

"Logical conclusion, gentlemen: We have one or more colleagues who supported the rigorous checks on the BFP candidates with information from the authorities. This is also why many attempts at infiltration failed."

The bitter taste in Rittmeister's mouth simply wouldn't go away. Nevertheless, he continued persistently:

"For security reasons, Schwamm only appears in the files of the BfV in Cologne. We made him available to the SfS at the LKA Berlin. The chain of people who knew about it was deliberately kept small. That's why he initially only reported to my department, and we then passed the findings on to the special department."

Rittmeister reached for the water bottle, took a quick sip and gave himself, and especially the men, a short break to think.

"Schwamm managed to advance very quickly into the Inner Circle through his commitment, skill and discipline, and he was soon working in the BFP's command center."

In retrospect, Rittmeister knew that he should have had a psychological profile of the undercover agent Schwamm made before he was smuggled in. Under the pressure of expectations and the all-too-glamorous goal, the undercover agent's judgment was overridden. Psychologists called such a phenomenon "loss of reality." Schwamm was just a henchman and bootlicker in the secret society. His ingratiation, especially towards the BFP boss, was downright embarrassing. No one had ever trusted him; for important meetings he was sent to the gas station or somewhere else, as was now known.

"Due to his position of trust, Schwamm was able to provide us with important information regarding meetings, actions, events and top secret matters of the target organization's leadership. My deputy, Karl-Heinz Vogel, was responsible for recording and evaluating these reports," said the speaker coolly and seemingly calmly.

Rittmeister had to smile inwardly when he thought of Vogel, this old and experienced fox. Vogel had very quickly realized that the secret investigator's reports were hot air. The idiot Schwamm reported three barbecues with mainly young people, but declared these gatherings to be "paramilitary meetings of the hard core." At the first two events, the operational forces were discovered in advance and had to withdraw. At the third meeting, however, the

preparations were successful, but the operation was a complete and extremely embarrassing failure. After this debacle, Vogel refused to continue to look after Schwamm, and even submitted an application for early retirement. This was of course rejected—for the time being. It was also Vogel's suggestion, since the BFP's headquarters were in Berlin, that Schwamm should be officially made available to the local STATE CRIMINAL POLICE OFFICE (LKA). They were to fill their files with the politically desired madness. The BERLIN OFFICE FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE CONSTITUTION was completely ignored because it had proven itself to be completely unsuitable in the past. The Berlin SfS urgently needed an increase in financial resources, and a current source of danger came at just the right time. Birkle was of course instructed by Rittmeister, but he agreed nonetheless. Birkle had noticed that he was happy for the bunglers from the special department to make this promising recruitment. He had no respect for this kind of nest-fouling, which he had to experience in abundance in the SfS. Justus Birkle could very well have done without this special department.

Rittmeister knew the extensive stack of files on the current case. Since 1:30 a.m., he and Birkle had been forced to deal with these fairy tales in the LKA office. They were well aware that if the truth came out, both of them would be unemployed, but that would not affect them any further. Their salaries were secure. It was more about the damage to the reputation of their departments that would be done. Therefore, both offices needed a successful arrest of the leaders of the BFP in order to satisfy the respective interior ministries, but above all the press. The "fight against the far-right" is progressing successfully. Nevertheless, just a few hours ago they were laughing out loud as they studied the files. Tears rolled down their cheeks, while the cognac in their coffee and the fine cigars that Birkle always had in his bug-proof office spurred them on. They were alone and could afford this exuberance, this unvarnished honesty. After more than 30

years of secret service work full of deceit and deception, nothing could surprise them anymore. Adelheid Freytag made sure that they were not disturbed in the anteroom.

Schwamm had claimed that crosses were burned at BFP celebrations, swastika flags were hoisted and, above all, shooting exercises with live ammunition were carried out. One or two Special Task Force (SEK) teams, riot police and several representatives of various constitutional bodies were then brought to the site. Everyone wanted to be there. According to secret files, however, only sausages were burned, swastika flags were not flown either, but parasols were put up, but without hooks or even crosses, but with the BFP colors of freedom, black, red and gold, as the reconnaissance troops confirmed. There was certainly shooting with live ammunition. Hans Rittmeister corrected himself, because according to the files, shots were fired once; the SEK and snipers were then ordered to be ready: "Prepare to storm!" However, a reconnaissance patrol cleared up the situation at the last second. A bottle of champagne was uncorked—someone was apparently celebrating a birthday. The cork happened to fly towards the edge of the forest, towards a well-camouflaged scout. A young SEK officer radioed in all seriousness and asked whether this could be considered an attack. The operation, once again a total shit show, a complete fiasco, was then called off and the "extremely dangerous neo-Nazis" were allowed to continue to barbeque. 'Dear God,' thought Rittmeister, 'if another service gets hold of this file, we would be the laughing stock of political Germany. We must find a *Brown Army Faction*, and if we are forced to form it ourselves—it wouldn't be the first time!'

Rittmeister knew that civil rights were seriously violated in the fight against nationalists, Islamists, terrorists and so on. AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL has become increasingly aware of the actions in Germany. HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH has long been reporting on

alarming events in the Federal Republic, but these have largely gone unnoticed, as the narrow-minded German *Michel* can hardly be mobilized anymore because of his TV and Sunday trips in his meticulously maintained year-old car. The apathy of the people has always been the strength of the secret services—throughout Europe. At some point those responsible will have to end up before the European Court of Human Rights if liberal democracy is to survive.

There were even plans to frame the head of the BFP for rape, which would have been easy. A willing Eastern European woman would have acted as the "victim" of the "false flag" operation in order to receive an unlimited residence permit as a reward. A drug trap was also considered, but ultimately they wanted a political conviction. The danger of *right-wing* views should be highlighted and not the putative potential of a sex offender or a common criminal.

"The aim of the undercover investigation was originally to prove that the secret society was acting criminally or unconstitutionally, which would have meant a ban and possibly the disintegration of the BFP. To date, this effort has failed and the FEDERAL CONSTITUTIONAL COURT can no longer be relied upon when it comes to applications for a ban," Rittmeister noted cynically. "Cooperation with other authorities has also proven difficult. Ever since the Allies were kind enough to write our constitution after the war, the internal security of the federalist German Republic has been in hopeless chaos. Our highest priority therefore remains the arrest of the BFP board, especially the leader and founding father, as we are convinced that the structures will then dissolve in the foreseeable future."

And he continued to summarize:

"I must admit that this has so far proved difficult or even impossible. At the weekly conspiratorial meetings with Thorsten Schwamm, he was unable to give us a single concrete indication

of a usable crime. We have no audio recordings of the meetings of the Inner Circle, as our man was regularly searched by security forces. This protection unit is responsible for the boss's safe-keeping. These gentlemen are particularly obedient and fanatical; wearing a wire would have been fatal for Schwamm."

It all fit perfectly into the story, pondered Rittmeister, but the authorities knew nothing at all. Schwamm reported everything in detail, but they simply found nothing of use. In the end, it will be as Rittmeister and Birkle had fabulated with sophistries hours ago: The BFP was a group of men and women between the ages of 18 and 80 who not only thought and cared about the situation in their homeland, but also took action. The armchair farters among the people, who raged at the news but didn't act as long as beer and petrol prices remained stable and vacations were guaranteed, could learn something from them.

Rittmeister and Birkle agreed that they knew of district representatives of the *JUNGE UNION* (the youth of the CDU) who argued more radically at the regulars' table of the local pub than the BFP—they were of course also under surveillance. There was no need or even the *right* to speak of the irrefutable danger of left-wing extremism. The generation of 1968 was in power and would remain so for a few more years. The truth, however, was simple. The BFP had managed to establish itself as a recognized link between the various national organizations, associations and orientations—its greatest achievement. That was the reason why the political secret services pursued the *Bund* so doggedly, and were forced to do so.

"Gentlemen, we know with almost absolute certainty that the BFP maintains contacts with every right-wing group in Europe, North America and Australia—from nationalistic liberals to violent extremists. They have advocates in all the major popular parties in the Federal Republic of Germany. According to

Schwamm, the members are well equipped with weapons and have a strong, intellectual grassroots leadership. They therefore represent an avant-garde that should not be underestimated."

Now the eager officials took Rittmeister's bait, now the tug could come and they would be on the hook. Then the detailed lecture will have been worth it.

"The BfV and the local State Criminal Police Office are of the shared conviction, even if I am not allowed to go into detail, that the BFP has taken a leadership role in the creation of a right-wing militant, possibly terrorist organization."

Rittmeister paused briefly to drink some more water while a picture of a shopping street in Jerusalem devastated by a car bomb magically flashed on the screen. This photograph had nothing to do with the secret society, but the officials did not know that—and it did not matter. Out of the corner of his eye, Rittmeister saw Birkle looking away in shame. Had he caught a glimpse of the expression of pain on his friend's somewhat plump face?

"The actions of the BFP," Rittmeister continued, "to combat drugs and the crime associated with them, as well as the publication of their inflammatory monthly magazine, GERMANIA INCOGNITA (GI), serve the sole purpose of blinding the naive citizen to the true goals."

Rittmeister knew that the BFP had chased away more drug dealers in the Berlin area alone in one year than the police had in the previous five years. This made them many enemies, but also many friends, particularly in the police. Quite a few were prepared to turn a blind eye to the methods on occasion. Incidentally, he himself enjoyed reading the well-made and impressive magazine GI, purely for official purposes of course. The spelling was occasionally not quite right and the grammar not always perfect, but in every word the reader sensed the devotion, the

love of the creators for their fatherland. The lines were a balanced mixture of passion and reason. The reader was drawn relentlessly into the spell of the revealed world of the soul. There was no escape!

"We are particularly concerned about the fact that the BFP, with over 600 members, but also countless sympathizers and henchmen, is receiving a great deal of financial support—from workers to academics to industrialists, who shy away from street fighting but make their contribution in this way," Rittmeister exaggerated unmoved. "On 30 January, we were able to observe the range of supporters in Brandenburg, in the tranquil region *Märkische Schweiz*, when a closed conference was held in a splendid castle hotel. Even if the program was not open to attack, we are certain that the BFP celebrated the anniversary of the 1933 *Nazi seizure of power* on a scale never seen before."

'Now I have them where I want them,' thought Rittmeister happily as he surveyed the group again. They sat there with shining eyes—like children who have been promised chocolate. They were convinced that this group posed a threat to their state. It was just as well that they had not understood that they had far more in common with the supporters than with the antagonists of the secret society. And anyway, the files spoke volumes. The BFP boss was heavily in debt. He took everything on himself. He financed the campaigns out of his own pocket and was seriously in arrears with the costs of the small publishing house. The printing costs were high, but Hardenberg did not want to skimp on quality. A few events made a profit, but others did not, so he had to prosper. Rittmeister was a little ashamed of his thoughts ...

"I am telling you all this so that you understand that this is a highly dangerous and secretive community whose activities must be stopped. I have therefore been honored by your and my employer with the task of providing you with information and

supervising this operation, even if I am happy to leave the leadership to Director Birkle, whom we all hold in high esteem," said Rittmeister, smiling at Birkle in the hope of cheering him up a little. "We at the BfV have been working towards this day for a long time, and regardless of what we personally think about it, we must and will all do our duty," Rittmeister concluded his speech, knowing that only Birkle would understand the profound meaning of the last sentence.

Rittmeister sat down at the table again while Birkle stood up to walk behind his back, in the semi-darkness, to the lectern. He smoothed out his light jacket, which was a little tight around his stomach. His short, stocky legs, beneath his still muscular upper body, stamped on the tiled floor as if he wanted to tread down the joints one by one. In his face, the broad one with the large, usually so watchful eyes and the high forehead, one could see tiredness and reluctance.

ooooo

While Thorsten Schwamm began to write everything down in detail in the stylish ambience of the conspiratorial apartment in the north of Berlin, Sven Hardenberg took the transcripts into the living room and laid them on the table next to the open fireplace. His old Rottweiler, *Bismarck*, had spread out on the large fur near the blazing fire and was falling asleep, snoring as usual. It seemed to be getting light outside, but that was only the moonlight, which was reflecting silver from the icy blanket of snow on the still deserted streets of Berlin.

Hardenberg took his GLOCK, let the full magazine slide out of the grip, pulled the slide back—the last cartridge from the chamber fell gently into his hand. He went into the dining room and laid everything out in a row on the large sideboard. They should not find any reason to have to shoot him in *self-defense* when they stormed the apartment. Then he picked up the reports, moved

the club chair close to the fire, sat down and leisurely left the pages to the cleansing flames—one by one and not without sadness. The evidence had to disappear; the mysterious source had to be protected at all costs—even if her motive was still unclear to him. He watched the licking, flickering blaze feasting on the new nourishment they had just received and, quite incidentally, his thoughts wandered, as they had done so often since then, to that pivotal day.

It was about five weeks ago when Hardenberg met her. The first week of his favorite month, November, had begun. It was cold, wet and misty—and unlike most people, Sven, whose zodiacal sign was Scorpio, did not suffer from the rigors of this miserable weather. He sat in his local pub, GERMANENSCHÄNKE, and allowed himself a few beers, perhaps a few too many. Since he hardly drank alcohol, it did not take much to cloud his senses. He was very aware of this danger. Distant and withdrawn, he felt comfortable in his voluntary seclusion.

He saw her come in and was immediately thrilled—but of course he didn't show it. There was an empty bar stool next to him. She chose it with high spirits. His bodyguard, who watched his back on such occasions, eyed her critically, but Hardenberg made it clear to him that it would be fine. She ordered mead and was served it in a small, lacquered drinking horn on a stand by the graceful barmaid Nadine. He toasted her and she smiled at him in that natural way that characterizes very good-looking people. He replied cautiously. She had deep blue, cheeky eyes, not unlike his own. Her hair was short, straight and straw-blonde. Her body was long and athletic. Her soft, white skin shone, like her ivory-colored teeth, in the bar twilight. She was like a Valkyrie—his ideal; the Germanic goddess of his visions—a Nordic princess the likes of which are rarely seen.

They started talking and chatted casually. She introduced herself: Her name was Sigrun—she had only given her first name. At this point, Sven Hardenberg was suspicious; this ancient Germanic name was too blessed to be true. The chitchat then turned serious. It was about politics, religion and philosophy. And late at night, or was it early in the morning, they both spoke of their love for their fatherland, their customs and traditions, of the pain they felt when they were powerless in the face of the irrefutable spirit of the times, the *Zeitgeist*. She looked at him in a very special way and her shining eyes gave him the unmistakable feeling that everything he said was of the utmost importance to her. Her gestures also made him understand the same thing, and Sigrun seemed to encourage him to reveal much more about himself. Hardenberg had ignored all caution for the first time in a long time and felt free and unburdened. Perhaps he stood boldly at the edge of a precipice and enjoyed the danger, but he would not jump in of his own accord—although a little push would have been enough. The vain, notorious womanizer, who saw the *weaker sex* as nothing more than an obstacle on his path to perfection, became fickle.

Sigrun had a mission, but she had lost sight of it for the moment. She had not planned to give herself up like that, but she let herself emotionally fall and she knew he would be there. This man struck a chord within her that no one else had ever managed to do with such intensity. He touched the depths of her soul. At the same time, she was certain that he would feel her touch too. She had the unmistakable feeling that Hardenberg could return little or no affection, but that was all the more tempting for her. Only rarely in life does one receive the gift of such an experience. Most people have never been so lucky. There was only the now, only this instant, nothing else. No tomorrow. No day after tomorrow.

But at some point in this extraordinary night, the moment came when desire overcame them both ...

Hardenberg still remembered those splendid, enchanted moments when all the unpleasantness of life seemed far away and only the present and the two of them mattered. Had she known how much he loved and needed her on that unreal night? Did she have the same feelings? Did she know that she had saved him from drowning, if only for the few hours they were together? At least that one precious night! Since that experience, there had been breaths of longing and desire in which the thought of her threatened to suffocate him ...

Sigrun regretted nothing, nothing at all. Before she left in the morning, she lovingly covered him up and kissed his forehead melancholically. She felt the need to touch his warm skin one more time and to breathe his unmistakable scent deep into her lungs, and thus into her soul, so that she would never forget him again. He did not notice, nor did he notice that she put a large envelope of papers in a drawer of his desk. The handover of the protocols with the statements of the traitor Schwamm: her actual task.

When she left the apartment and waved politely to the bodyguard in the hallway, neither she nor Hardenberg knew that she already carried the auspicious seed of their fateful encounter within her. As the deepest proof of her love and her womanhood, she would give Sven Hardenberg and herself immortality in nine months by giving birth to a child.

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Justus Birkle now spoke to the now impatient men:

"Well, dear Hans, gentlemen, that was very detailed and informative ... and detailed—but I already said that," the LKA director tried to joke. "For almost three years, the members of the BFP have avoided any violation of the law, at least we have not been able to prove anything against them, despite the investigative

successes of the undercover agent Thorsten Schwamm," said Birkle, who could not resist this friendly verbal swipe at the BfV.

Birkle knew that his claim was not true. There were minor offenses that would hardly have resulted in a prison sentence. The BFP leader was armed with a GLOCK, but he used the pistol very restrictively, so that this would have been a violation of the weapons law at most. The politicians wanted to make a big blow. Anything less than ten years in prison for the leader would have been a failure. Birkle was disgusted by this dirty game. He had also told Rittmeister this that morning, but the latter reacted cautiously and waited—typical agent, the enemy could be listening. But Birkle was serious, very serious.

Last summer, BKA investigators almost struck when it became known that a truckload of extremely valuable military weapons was located on an overgrown weekend property belonging to the leadership of the BFP near Questenberg in the fairytale-like southeastern Harz Mountains. Birkle was able to stop the BKA's operation at the last minute. Rittmeister knew about it in advance, but did not lift a finger. He would have wished the overzealous and often complacent officials of the FEDERAL CRIMINAL POLICE OFFICE this embarrassing setback. The undercover investigation would have failed, but the growing problem of "Thorsten Schwamm" would have been solved.

The irony of the false flag story was that the van belonged to the now completely incompetent Schwamm. The weapons were organized by the SfS. Old machine guns without bolts from the last, the second, Great War. Although the special department was located in the same building complex as the LKA, albeit separate and with additional security, it was not considered necessary to inform the colleagues. Hardly any outsiders had access, and that included everyone who was not in the special department.

Director Birkle was more than angry, downright indignant. Heads rolled after that, but not much had changed. It is well known that the various departments and services do not like to work together. The weekly meetings of the services in the bug-proof conference room had less to do with exchanging information than with a competition in which all the subtleties of intelligence counter-intelligence and disinformation dominated the atmosphere.

Birkle operated the slide projector and continued:

"The first three images you will see here show members of the Inner Circle. It is still unconfirmed whether these gentlemen are relevant to today's operation. It is unknown whether members of the *Schutztrupp*, the leader's well-trained and fanatical life guard, will also be on site. But you, gentlemen, are well prepared for all eventualities."

Birkle operated the switch several times without haste.

"The fourth image shows the main target: Sven Ansgar Hardenberg, the figurehead of the secret society, who has lived in Berlin since around mid-1990 and only registered here at the end of 1990," Birkle said carefully and paused briefly. "He is expected to put up resistance. He is considered highly intelligent and extremely dangerous. He is 37 years old, although, as you can certainly confirm, he doesn't look older than 30. Here is a brief biography: Hardenberg was born in Hamburg. His father is a well-known shipowner who still co-finances his son's political efforts today. He speaks several Indo-Germanic languages. After graduating from Gymnasium, which he passed early and extremely successfully at the age of 18, he studied political science and philosophy for four semesters in Heidelberg, but dropped out after successfully completing his preliminary diploma."

Birkle moved on to the next photo, which showed a very tall, athletic and handsome soldier in uniform and continued:

"He then applied to be an officer candidate in the German Navy. Instead of starting Officer Course I, however, the target person registered with the training inspectorate for weapons divers, the German SEALs, in Eckernförde. Hardenberg successfully completed the *Kampfschwimmer* course within two years as the top student. After four years of service, Hardenberg waived the mandatory re-enlistment and unexpectedly left the combat diver company, although all options were open to him. Even during this time he was very politically active, as the MILITARY COUNTERINTELLIGENCE SERVICE (MAD) confirms, which also often led to internal conflicts."

Birkle now looked around and noticed the professional attention of the SEK officers, who were trying to assess the danger to themselves and their colleagues. Rittmeister looked at his friend Birkle in the light of the projector and was surprised that this information was being made known here, since much of it was classified. He was more than astonished after the next sentences and wondered what Birkle's goal was.

"He was in South Africa from late 1987 to 1988 or 1989. We assume that he was a mercenary against the communist ANC rebels from Zimbabwe, but we have no certain information. The BND is keeping quiet, despite several inquiries. What is certain is that he trained Croatian special units in the liberation struggle against the Serbs. You can see, gentlemen, that the risk potential here is great!" stressed Birkle, switching to the overhead projector, turning the slide and presenting a map of Berlin. "Yesterday evening, at 11 p.m., the Sfs was expecting a call from Thorsten Schwamm, but it never came. Schwamm was supposed to attend a meeting at 6 p.m. with an *old Nazi* in his villa in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee. According to Schwamm's ominous statement, BFP leader Hardenberg was asked to attend a meeting of an organization called "ODESSA," whose most important members were to travel from all over Europe. Since arrest warrants exist for some of these personalities, we were there in considerable

numbers." Birkle saw the questioning surprise and disbelief in the listeners' eyes.

"The public may believe that ODESSA, the ORGANIZATION OF FORMER SS MEMBERS, no longer exists or never did, but it does, even if its name has changed many times over the last thirty years," Birkle claimed without batting an eyelid and without revealing his actual knowledge. "We know AKTION DEUTSCHLAND, OPERATION BERNHARD, SPINNE, CEDADE, STILLE HILFE, HILFSGEMEINSCHAFT AUF GEGENSEITIGKEIT (HIAG) and others. It is difficult to say whether all these phantom names represent an organization. Who or what ODESSA was or is, for example, is still a secret to this day. The remnants of *Hitler's order under the Totenkopf* have not broken their silence. But we do know one thing: All serious initiatives are coordinated by a single, secret, central office." Birkle had learned how to disguise clues. You just have to cry wolf often enough until no one believes it anymore. Then the wolf's time has come, and he is mistaken for a harmless sheep.

He paused, pointed to the screen with the light stick and marked the place near the lake *Großer Wannsee*.

"Schwamm, who had to act as a driver for the BFP executives, credibly reported that the target, Sven Hardenberg, was to receive a considerable sum of cash that evening. Apparently Hardenberg would also expect weapons and the prospect of considerable support to build up a paramilitary fighting community."

He paused briefly to avoid laughing out loud. He had never heard such an absurd story before and he suspected the extent of the potential debacle. Nevertheless, the SfS special department, which had come under strong political pressure this year, insisted on the accuracy of the unverified information it had received from the BfV contact office. Birkle had decided hours ago not to be present at the raid. He would fulfill his double duty here, but that was all.

"Despite visual and acoustic observation of the object, there was no meeting there. Hardenberg and Schwamm were nowhere to be found until about two hours ago. The two apartments of Sven Hardenberg that we know of are empty, and the BFP board members are both at home, but are still being observed. However, there is a conspiratorial apartment that we only recently learned about. Please look at target object three on the map."

Birkle now pointed to a spot in the northeast of Berlin and took the time to take a sip from the coffee cup he had brought with him. The taste of the brandy was now stronger than that of the dark brew.

"This apartment is protected against electronic radiation by a metal shield, so the wiretapping failed, but the infrared thermal images taken half an hour ago have definitively confirmed to us that the darkened apartment conceals at least two people and a dog, presumably the leader's Rottweiler."

Once again, the screen magically showed a photo of Schwamm and Hardenberg at an event. They were toasting each other with beer mugs. A viewer might think he is seeing two friends in a social setting. Well, maybe Hardenberg thought so too.

"The special department in charge assumes," Birkle concluded, "that Schwamm has been exposed and is in grave danger of his life. That is why we raised the alarm at midnight. The SfS insists on the realistic danger of armed violence, since the delivery that Schwamm announced may already have taken place."

Birkle continued, brushing aside all rational concerns, as he had often been forced to do in recent years.

"We have brought together several teams, as originally there were at least three objects. Now we are assuming only one target object, but after a successful raid we will have to search several apartments of the BFP leadership as well as the homes of the members of the security team. The group leaders have all the details in writing, so that final discussions can be made on the road." Birkle pointed to the large map again and said: "The precision marksmen of the PSK will form two pairs, and will thus be

assigned in squad strength to the two reconnaissance teams on site, here and here. The view of the primary target object is excellent. However, I expect the highest level of discipline and restraint, as I assume that SEK squad I will succeed in a smooth raid. Squads II to IV will remain on standby and secure the outside area. The raid will take place immediately after arrival at the site."

Now Birkle came to the end of the operational speech and was relieved to have finally done his duty. He would not see these young men again. His deputy would accompany them on the mission. When they returned, his office would already be cleared out. Not even Rittmeister knew that he was carrying his resignation in his pocket. The industrious and loyal Adelheid Freytag had already packed up everything at the LKA headquarters, including the belongings from her own desk. And she had made an important phone call. Birkle himself gave the order with far-reaching consequences.

"I expect you to act consistently but with moderation. These are not Red Army Faction terrorists, violent drug dealers, Turkish or Russian mafia, but decent German patriots who have crossed a line that we, as representatives of the constitutional state, must show them again—no more, no less."

Birkle turned the light back on using the remote control, looked around one last time without any concern and breathed a sigh of relief, but quietly, before continuing:

"It is now ten past six. Any questions?" As expected, there were none.

"Well, gentlemen, good luck, come back safe and sound. Load the vehicles and departure in five minutes!"

Birkle left the room without looking back, and he didn't speak to Rittmeister either, as everything had been said in good time. He drove quickly and silently with Adelheid Freytag back to the headquarters of the LKA—with blue lights flashing but no siren. Berlin was slowly waking up, this cosmopolitan city to which the

Swabian had such an ambivalent relationship. It was dirty and run-down, but at the same time exciting and full of potential. "Berlin" sounded like power, reign and adventure, which you could actually find on every corner.

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Sven Hardenberg was still thinking about the wonderful times of political struggle. In barely three years, the LEAGUE OF FREE PATRIOTS (BFP) had managed to gain great influence in the political landscape of post-war Germany. There had also been progress for the Germanic-German cause, which had been hard fought for. The greatest achievement, however—although the BFP was hardly known and the authorities rambled about it as a "secret society"—, was the important fact, that the *Bund* had managed to unite a large part of the patriotic forces—and not only in Germany. Hardenberg in particular had made many friends, but also enemies, even in his own camp. Some people disparagingly called him a right-wing radical, and he had no objections. He was "radical"—an extremely positive neologism. Radical came from the Latin *radix*, which means "root." Only a radical could get to the root of problems or injustices, while the self-proclaimed do-gooders cowardly parroted everything that seemed "appropriate" and desperately clung to the mask that concealed the truth on the ugly face of reality. Sven Hardenberg's motto therefore remained *Oderint dum metuant*—they could hate him, as long as they feared him.

There had also been setbacks. Hardenberg had to experience how young, committed comrades were put under pressure or attacked by authorities, teachers and left-wing extremist gangs. They began to doubt, could not withstand the psychological and physical violence, fell and ended up in the swamp of multicultural utopias, drugs and hatred of Germans. The slogan "Berlin remains German!" could not be realized under the given circumstances. The BFP was, nevertheless, always obliged and spiritu-

ally called to preserve and increase the historical heritage. Honor and obligation were too great a burden for a few, they were not capable of it, broke down or allowed themselves to be seduced by platitudes, and Hardenberg and the league had to separate themselves from them: Frail, sickly limbs had to be discarded for the good of the healthy body.

As his thoughts slowly returned to reality and he turned his attention back to the fire, which was burning contentedly because of the paper sacrifice, Hardenberg leaned back and waited for the inevitable. Retreat was out of the question for him. He was not the villain who used slanderers against undesirable opponents. That was the others. He would not spend his life on the run for Schwamm, this traitorous agitator and henchman of the state. He was not afraid of a criminal trial, because that would reveal who the real delinquent was. The BFP boss was firmly convinced of this at this point and would never have let himself be persuaded otherwise, although he was more than familiar with the devious moves of the political justice system.

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Justus Birkle went to his office, which now seemed deserted. He put his prepared letter of resignation on the empty desk and was about to leave when his cell phone rang. He motioned to his assistant Adelheid Freytag to take the call. Birkle could practically feel her tension, but she did as she was told. It was Hans Rittmeister who had been given the honor of ringing in the operation. He wanted Birkle to share in the moment the order was given. The outgoing LKA director confidently took the glowing device, switched on the external loudspeaker and heard the *Jäger's* call:

"For the record: It is now 6:44. To all tactical commandos: Storm! Storm! Storm!"

The undercover agent Schwamm had been busy with his written confession for an hour. Sven Hardenberg would never read it, but he had already heard everything. More information was not required—and more would be difficult for him to handle emotionally.

The "Hoch- und Deutschmeister-March" was playing in the background. He took a final COHIBA ESPLENDIDOS, leaned back comfortably and lit it with relish. Hardenberg inhaled deeply, closed his eyes and enjoyed the fine aroma of the celebratory cigar. The expensive taste caressed his palate—and a tiny sound of satisfaction escaped from the depths of his throat.

At 6:45 a.m., the door flew off its hinges!

When All Become Disloyal

Otto Freising, the 58-year-old presiding judge at the Berlin Regional Court, once again looked somewhat tensely at the large wall clock as he lifted his second cup of coffee that morning. The leading senior public prosecutor, Dr. jur. Kaufmann, had announced his gracious appearance for 7:30 a.m.—and he was notorious for his Prussian punctuality. Before the hearing, there was to be an unofficial discourse between the state's attorney, the new head of the secretive "Operational Department East" of the BfV, Michel Rosenblum, Sven Hardenberg and his defense attorneys, the renowned Dr. jur. Oswald Paasche from Munich and the well-known and feared defense attorney of the national conservative spectrum, lawyer Wolfram Glowania.

Freising had granted the ominous but not unusual request without knowing the reason. Now he had a hint of doubt. At exactly half past seven there was a knock on the judge's door. His neat secretary looked in expectantly and whispered quietly and familiarly:

"Otto, everyone is here now. Mr. Hardenberg has just been brought upstairs by four officers."

"Thank you, Leni! The officers should stay outside and I would like to see Mr. Hardenberg without handcuffs or leg irons; that really isn't necessary!" the gaunt, gray-haired judge emphasized emphatically.

Leni Schwarzkopf looked surprised, but didn't let it show when she immediately announced to the assembly in her office:

"Presiding judge Freising will receive you in his chambers now, gentlemen." And to the judicial officers: "Please remove the shackles and wait here. You are welcome to help yourself to the coffee machine."

The judicial officers followed the order, even if it seemed incomprehensible. First solitary confinement, transport to Berlin by helicopter only if fully shackled, SEK officers in plain clothes had to be present everywhere, and now the oh-so-dangerous Hardenberg is allowed to stay in the judge's chamber without any supervision—most likely with coffee and cake! But what did they know? If the pompous senior public prosecutor gets a slap in the face, he would have deserved it long ago.

"Gentlemen, please take a seat," said Judge Freising, looking at Hardenberg and being surprised, even overwhelmed, by his appearance. Normally, prisoners on remand were indifferent to how they appeared in court, which was often a visual insult to the judge and his deputies. However, it was immediately apparent that this prisoner perfectly displayed his mental attitude with unyielding pride and the necessary external aesthetics. He wore a dark gray suit with a waistcoat and red tie. His parents had brought this with them, and Hardenberg was allowed to change in the waiting cell in the courthouse. The black shoes were perfectly clean and shiny, and the socks and underwear were of course new. The pocket square and the cuffs of the snow-white shirt bore his initials. He was even given his watch and signet ring for the duration of the trial. After many months in the mandatory prison uniform due to an alleged escape risk, Sven Hardenberg felt like a fully-fledged human being again.

"I am giving you a vote of confidence, Mr. Hardenberg, which I hope you will not abuse."

Hardenberg looked at the judge, nodded silently and then looked at those present.

"Our client is not a criminal, Mr. Chairman, but a gentleman. You have no need to worry," said Dr. Paasche without being asked.

"You will allow me to object, Mr. Chairman. I feel very threatened. I know the files..."

"This is pure polemic, which I reject with the utmost vehemence in the name of my illustrious client!" shouted Glowania at the protesting senior public prosecutor Kaufmann. The defense attorney had long been friends with Hardenberg, who was the same age as him.

Judge Freising snorted:

"Gentlemen, please, I beg you. We are not yet in the courtroom, but I expect collegial behavior there too. Objection noted, but nevertheless: Hardenberg remains uncuffed!"

Hardenberg seemed to follow the banter with attentive amusement.

"Well, Dr. Kaufmann, why are we here?" the judge wanted to know. "Please enlighten us!"

The chief prosecutor looked at his neighbor and then explained the facts.

"Director Rosenblum of the BfV has asked for administrative assistance. It is a precarious case: Thorsten Schwamm had reported to us that after the brutal torture ..."

"Not again, Mr. Chief Public Prosecutor ...!" interjected Hardenberg's attorney Glowania.

"It's fine. In any case, Schwamm reported that he had been shown records in the secret apartment of the BFP. These records were classified as 'top secret' and kept under lock and key. We conclude that either a mole in the BfV or in the special department leaked these copies to the BFP. Hardenberg stubbornly fended off all our attempts to question him on this topic while in custody. The BfV and the public prosecutor's office have a great desire to uncover this betrayal of official secrets." Dr. Kaufmann felt clearly uncomfortable in the middle of the small room. He tried hard to avoid eye contact with Sven Hardenberg and continued: "Even if I am aiming for a conviction with a severe sentence, this is about proportionality. In consultation with Director Rosenblum, and assuming your consent, I would like to make the following offer to Mr. Hardenberg's defense attorneys: The public prosecutor's office would agree to a suspended sentence if Mr.

Hardenberg testifies here and now as to who gave him the confidential records, which were intended for official use only and were therefore classified."

The shock in the room was overwhelming. Judge Freising seemed speechless, Rosenblum and Kaufmann were restless, the defense attorneys breathed deeply in and out, only the stoic Hardenberg remained composed. Only his expression became increasingly dark. Dr. Paasche seemed to be the first to regain his composure:

"I am a little confused, colleague, why did you not make us this offer earlier?"

Judge Freising now took the initiative:

"Confused? I'm astonished! How did you imagine this, Mr. Chief Public Prosecutor? Do you consider this information to be so important that it would justify such an agreement?"

"Yes, indeed! The fact that intelligence conversation protocols end up with suspects is a question of internal security. Countless informants could be in mortal danger. The extent of the damage to the country would be immense, which is the only reason I am prepared to make such an essential offer."

"I understand your argument and am inclined to concur. Do you have anything to add, Mr. Rosenblum?"

"Dr. Kaufmann has described the most important points. Perhaps I may add that the OFFICE OF THE FEDERAL ATTORNEY GENERAL and the FEDERAL MINISTRY OF JUSTICE have formally declared their consent."

"Thank you, Mr. Rosenblum, now for the decisive statement." Judge Freising turned to Dr. Paasche and Attorney Glowania. Dr. Paasche seized the opportunity:

"I would like to discuss the *generous* offer with our client—confidentially." Glowania added: "I can only agree, but if I judge my client's facial expression correctly, we should first ask Mr. Hardenberg to what extent the offer is interesting at all."

Everyone nodded dutifully and looked expectantly at Hardenberg. Hardenberg sat up straight and spoke calmly:

"Gentlemen, what the public prosecutor is talking about is completely unknown to me, but even if I did know something," Hardenberg now stared menacingly at Dr. Kaufmann, "I would certainly not reveal it, especially not to this pompous *defender* of the law and his sleazy lackey from the BfV. Loyalty may not play a role in your world, but in my world it is crucial. To sum up: I gratefully decline your *offer*!"

The arrogant look that Hardenberg showed towards the chief prosecutor when making this last determination caused him to shout back angrily, almost uncontrollably:

"You will regret this, sir! I'm sending you to prison for life!"

"I still decide on that!" Judge Freising boomed decisively and looked around demandingly. His gaze made it unmistakably clear to everyone involved that he would not discuss his sovereign power. When no one in attendance responded, the judge said with a satisfied nod:

"Then we can begin. This conversation will remain confidential, as is customary. We'll all see each other in the courtroom in five minutes. You're dismissed!"

The portly senior public prosecutor was the first to storm out of the office. The others took their time. The judicial officers came in to handcuff Hardenberg again.

"That won't be necessary!" said Attorney Glowania angrily and stood in their way.

"I agree!" Judge Freising said conciliatorily and waved the officers out.

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The colossal courtroom on this November day was packed. Numerous spectators were standing in front of the door, but they were not allowed in. When Hardenberg entered the courtroom, he immediately saw his parents standing up and waving. Many friends and members of the BFP were also present. He also saw representatives of the press and a few men who tried to appear uninvolved with grim expressions: Criminal Investigation De-

partment (Kripo), State Security (ST), Office for the Protection of the Constitution (VS) or SEK officers? Who knew? Presumably all of them were there.

The trial before the large criminal division of the Berlin Regional Court began with the usual formalities. The senior public prosecutor, assisted by two trainee lawyers, read out the indictment and ranted about kidnapping, torture, serious bodily harm, illegal possession of weapons, coercion, threats and even organized crime. As expected, Hardenberg refrained from making a statement after his personal details were confirmed. The same was true of the two BFP executive members who were co-defendants for aiding and abetting. Their defense attorneys had agreed to keep a low profile as far as possible. Dr. Paasche and trial court-tested attorney Glowania were to coordinate and lead the defense. The taking of evidence began with the "victim."

"Please be seated, Mr. Schwamm."

Schwamm was instructed by the presiding judge to tell the truth, as he could also be punished as an injured party.

"Would you please take off your hood and sunglasses," said Judge Freising. The associate judge and the two lay judges remained silent.

"But I ..." Schwamm stammered incomprehensibly and sought support from the public prosecutor, who immediately stood up and spoke.

"Mr. Chairman, unfortunately the identity of the key witness is known, so his appearance has been changed for personal protection. For this reason, it is considered necessary to maintain this masking."

"I understand!" said Freising disapprovingly. "Let's continue. Mr. Schwamm, you are an undercover agent with the FEDERAL OFFICE FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE CONSTITUTION ..."

"No, I was..." Schwamm mumbled dejectedly.

"Please speak into the microphone!" the judge admonished him.

"I used to be an undercover agent, Your Honor," Schwamm repeated.

"The correct form of address is 'Mr. Chairman,' we are in Germany and not in a Hollywood movie," the judge warned, slightly irritated. "Please explain why you are no longer with the BfV."

"After the affair with the secret society, I was declared unfit for service for an indefinite period."

"Is it because of the injuries, Mr. Schwamm?"

"Well, my doctor says it's more likely to be a psychological issue."

There was subdued laughter in the courtroom.

"If anyone laughs again, there will be fines and I will have the room cleared!" hissed the chairman, who could hardly suppress a laugh himself. Freising knew the file all too well. "The background is known. Since you were unable to discover *any* criminal incidents during your assignment, we will limit ourselves to the brutal interrogation in December of last year."

The judge could not resist this allusion and saw Dr. Kaufmann eyeing him closely. Freising was too old to dream of a career as a federal judge or something similar. Threatening looks from a representative of the public prosecutor's office generally left him completely unmoved, especially when they came from the senior public prosecutor, who, as an influential member of the dubious world lodge TRILATERAL COMMISSION, had anything but a clean record.

Schwamm talked about the failed evening, the staged banquet, the interrogation, the protocols and the rescue by the Special Task Force (SEK).

"The public prosecutor's indictment points to an abduction, but you state it was a freely made decision. Were you kidnapped and brought to this conspiratorial apartment or not? I would like

to remind you once again of your duty as a witness to tell only the truth."

"No, Mr. Chairman, I was not kidnapped."

"You state that Hardenberg conducted the interrogation alone. Where were the co-defendants sitting to your left? Were they guarding the entrance door?"

Schwamm glanced furtively to his left, hoping he wouldn't see Hardenberg's eyes.

"They weren't even there. Everyone left after dinner. Only Hardenberg, his dog, and I were in the apartment."

"But during dinner, Hardenberg announced that he was going to interrogate you?"

"No, that was never discussed; at least I think so ..."

"But the participants of the last feast were aware of Hardenberg's true intentions, namely to force you to talk by using torture and violence?"

"I think so, but I don't know. No one spoke to me about it openly."

"Do you know if the other people present even knew that you were an undercover agent?"

"No, I don't know that for sure either, but Sven... er... Hardenberg must have told them—they certainly knew.."

Freising seemed to turn red and waved the indictment in the direction of the visibly agitated senior public prosecutor: "There's not much left, Dr. Kaufmann!" And then back to Schwamm: "But you were threatened with a weapon by Harden-berg? Describe the situation."

"Well, he often had his gun in his waistband ..."

"Did he point the gun at you and verbally threaten you?" the chairman asked, becoming increasingly impatient.

"No ..."

"Did Hardenberg threaten you at all?"

"Yes, often!"

"Examples!"

"He said, for example, that he would be back in ten minutes and that I could look forward to it."

"Ah ..."

"Mr. Chairman, if I may add ...?"

"You may, Mr. Prosecutor, but only after I have finished." Then he once more turned to the witness: "What happened next, Mr. Schwamm? The photographs and the doctor's certificate suggest something serious: fractures of both cheekbones, three broken ribs, a crushed hand, numerous bruises and hematomas ... How did you sustain these injuries?"

"Sven ..., uh, I mean, Mr. Hardenberg got a call early on this morning. I was still sitting in the bathtub—naked in the cold water. Then he stormed in ... He yelled at me and ..."

Schwamm could barely speak and was sobbing. It was the worst thing he had ever experienced. He still didn't understand how his own men could have done such a thing to him. After the special task force stormed the apartment and rescued him, his colleagues from the Sfs, to which he was detached, came, wrapped him in a blanket, and hastily pulled him out of the apartment. He screamed in pain as his stomach burned for reasons still unknown. They drove him in a van to an unknown location. There he was led into an abandoned building surrounded by forest. For a short time, after surviving the ordeal, he had felt safe. This feeling vanished suddenly. He saw three tall, broad-shouldered men—their expression was frightening. They were masked and wore gloves. Schwamm could barely recognize anything.

The building was silent, and the faces of his companions froze, showing no sign of pleasure. Suddenly and without explanation, the three hired thugs pounced on him. It only lasted about ten minutes, but it seemed like hours to him. They hurt him, a lot. Finally, they put his hand in an old freezer and slammed the lid shut. His unconsciousness saved him. That was one of the rea-

sons why he didn't see the man hiding behind the curtain, who carelessly dropped the cigar he had just lit to the floor and had to tremble to suppress his distress and disgust.

Schwamm only woke up in the hospital, in the radiology. The SfS was also well represented. They threatened him if he didn't keep everything to himself and play along. He had no choice; he had to go along. Hardenberg was the culprit and that was it. Schwamm agreed; resistance was useless. Later, they explained to him that he would be declared unfit for service, receive lifelong benefits, and be given a new lease on life through the witness protection program. Otherwise, they would drop him, and he would be fair game. He had no contact with his mother, and he didn't know his father. Schwamm now lived in the Netherlands. This testimony in court was his last duty and his last chance; afterward, he would be free. He never wanted to work for this country again. Before the trial, his testimony was rehearsed over and over again; he didn't have to fake his feelings of pain and shame. The lump in his throat gradually dissolved.

"Take your time, Mr. Schwamm," said the chairman with a touch of sympathy.

"Hardenberg pushed me under water and beat me wildly. Again and again. Then he dragged me out of the tub, took my right hand, placed it on the edge of the toilet, slammed the lid on it, and then stomped on it with full force ..." he sobbed again.

"Are you all right, Mr. Schwamm?" asked Freising.

"Perhaps we should take a short break?" the chief prosecutor asked hopefully.

"No, it's okay, I just want to get over with it. I had to get dressed and write everything down in the study. I couldn't leave anything out. Hardenberg knew almost everything; he had the secret protocols."

"Which protocols?"

"The written recordings of conversations with the BfV and the Sfs, the SPECIAL DEPARTMENT FOR STATE SECURITY. I had to report there every week."

"Where are these protocols now?"

"Unfortunately, I don't know. But I think he burned them."

"I understand. What happened next?"

"I wrote until the SEK came to get me out."

"I read that you had a large first-degree burn on your stomach. How did this happen?"

"Oh, that was the SEK. When the task force came in, they first threw a smoke grenade or something. Then they stormed into the living room. Sven's dog barked in alarm, but was shot dead with a shotgun."

"It was surely a dangerous fighting dog?" asked the dedicated animal lover Freising.

"No, it was a Rottweiler. His name was *Bismarck*, and he was already twelve or thirteen years old, I was told. He could barely walk—I think he was even blind," Schwamm added dejectedly. Judge Freising looked at Hardenberg, who was visibly moved. The judge could see Hardenberg close his eyes in pain for a brief moment, take a deep breath, and quickly regain control. The subject was quickly changed.

"Now about the burn ..."

"Yes, when the SEK team came into the study, the officers pulled me to the floor. The dinner plate also fell, and the freshly brewed coffee I had just brought from the kitchen must have spilled all over me, but I didn't fully realize it until I got to the hospital."

There was more restrained laughter in the courtroom, but the judge's reprimand was not forthcoming.

"I haven't heard of coffee. Please explain, Mr. Schwamm."

"Well, when I had to write everything down, Hardenberg made me coffee and food. Just before the attack, I brewed more coffee."

Freising raised an eyebrow. "Where? In the kitchen? Next to the entrance?" The presiding judge picked up the apartment floor plan and examined it.

"Yes, Mr. Chairman!"

"Can you say with certainty where Hardenberg was when you made coffee?"

"I think in the living room."

"Didn't you have any chance to escape?"

"I... uh ... I was just too scared ..."

"Thank you, Mr. Schwamm, I have no more questions for now. Now the chief public prosecutor can ask additional questions."

"Thank you, Mr. Chairman, but everything has been said."

"Well, then I give the floor to the defense."

Dr. Paasche was the first to stand up and addressed the judge:

"Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Schwamm, how do you feel about being a traitor?"

"Not like that, Mr. Colleague!" cried Dr. Kaufmann.

"I'll ask differently. Mr. Schwamm, have you ever doubted your role at the BfV?"

"Yes, every now and then."

"Did you inform your superiors of this?"

"Yes, indeed. I asked many times to be *brought home*, but my request was denied. I had to do my duty as an undercover operative and present my results, and only then would I be allowed out."

"Did you like Mr. Hardenberg?"

"Yes very!"

"Did you have sympathy for the goals of the BFP?"

"In the end, yes."

"If I can believe my client's account, and I do without reservation, then your file is full of fairy tales, as you admitted to Mr. Hardenberg. You were given detailed suggestions about what you had to say. Are you telling the truth today, or just another prescribed story?"

"I ... I'm telling the truth," Schwamm said after a meaningful pause.

"If all this is true, why are you lying? Why do you say Mr. Hardenberg tortured you?"

The senior prosecutor jumped up and raged: "The defense attorney is putting pressure on the witness! The pictures and the medical certificate are irrefutable ..."

"Sit down, *please*," said Judge Freising and then to the defense attorney:

"Mr. Attorney, that was probably a rhetorical question. Do you have any others?"

"Not at the moment. At least none that I want to ask right now."

Dr. Paasche handed over to Attorney Glowania.

"Mr. Schwamm, where do you live today?" Wolfram Glowania began bluntly.

"I object!" the chief prosecutor protested again..

"You may, Dr. Kaufmann. I just wanted to find out about the witness's dependencies."

"That's not relevant here."

"Then I will ask a relevant question, Mr. Colleague."

"I would also ask for that," added the chairman.

"Mr. Schwamm, you state that you had to record your activities as an undercover operative for Hardenberg."

"Yes ..."

"How did you do that?"

"What do you mean ...?"

"By hand? On the computer? How?"

"By hand."

"Show me how!"

"Where is this going, Mr. Defense Attorney?" Freising asked, anticipating the waving senior prosecutor.

"I would like to demonstrate that."

Attorney Glowania took a sheet of paper and placed it, including a ballpoint pen, on the witness table.

"Please, Mr. Schwamm, demonstrate how you did that." Schwamm looked puzzled and looked for the senior prosecutor, who, however, did not object. The judge encouraged him:

"Mr. Schwamm, pick up the pen and write your name on the sheet of paper in front of you!" Schwamm reluctantly followed the instruction.

"I see you're right-handed?"

"Yes, Mr. Attorney ..."

Glowania leafed through one of the files and picked up an illustration: "May we approach, Mr. Chairman?"

"Please!" And to the scribe: "Please note: At the request of the defense attorney, photographs will be examined."

The defense attorneys, the senior public prosecutor, and Schwamm approached the judge's bench together. Sven Hardenberg who, according to German court proceedings, also had this right, demonstratively remained seated.

"As can be seen in photograph number 18, Schwamm's right hand shows significant injuries. The medical certificate from the Berlin Charité hospital also mentions the 'right' hand." Everyone nodded in agreement. Glowania made a sudden turn and went back to the defense table, continuing:

"I read 'horizontal crush wounds across the back and palm of the hand,' 'multiple fractures,' 'massive swelling,' and 'severe restriction of movement.' Am I the only one in the room wondering how someone could write a report with a hand like that? One page? Two pages? No, eleven pages within a good hour, before the emergency services arrived! Yes, yes, I know, another rhetorical question—but a necessary one!" Glowania paused to compose himself. "I ask you, Mr. Schwamm, are you sticking to your story?"

"Yes ... yes ..."

"Then how do you explain this conflict?"

"I, I ..." stammered Schwamm, "I was scared and felt no pain..."

"Laughable. First torture, then coffee and cake ..."

"Carrot and stick, Mr. Colleague!" Dr. Kaufmann interjected. "A tried and tested method of torture!"

"You should know, *Sir!*"

"You're forgetting yourself, Mr. Defense Attorney!" Judge Freising promptly admonished.

"With all due respect, Mr. Chairman, but if I were to forget myself, it would have to sound completely different!"

"Do you have any further questions?"

"No, just a final comment: First, the victim writes half a novel with a crushed hand, and then he also eats lavishly with significant facial injuries. We're supposed to simply accept this implausible account? If those who believe it will be blessed, dear colleagues, then I'd rather remain suspicious and demonized!"

Attorney Glowania's words and remonstrances had triggered general unrest and dismay in the courtroom. Nevertheless, Schwamm was dismissed and escorted out by his bodyguard. He didn't dare look at Hardenberg and the others again, but he clearly felt their piercing gaze on his back.

"Since we are making surprisingly rapid progress today, we will take a ten-minute break." The presiding judge stood up and everyone followed his example.

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During the break in the proceedings, Glowania spoke upset to his colleague:

"This whole thing stinks!"

"I know, but we're powerless against the witness, the photographs, and the medical certificate. If no one backs down, Mr. Hardenberg will be convicted. We can write off kidnapping and torture, but the assault, threats, coercion, possession of weapons, and a few misdemeanors remain. Yes, this whole thing stinks—because it is rotting from the head! But the SfS and the Federal

Office for the Protection of the Constitution remain absolutely credible in the eyes of the court."

"This shyster advocate Kaufmann has threaded everything pretty well, Chairman Freising nevertheless seems open to contradictions ..."

"But in the end he will have no choice but to sentence Mr. Hardenberg. The piece is practiced too well. Schwamm is the weak point, but not to grasp. The state officers have long since coordinated their story well, so I don't see any attack surface." Then he turned to Hardenberg, who listened concentrated: "I only see a small chance: You will have to testify and convince the chamber."

"Dr. Paasche, I think that judgment has already been passed. I don't see why I should play along, it's under my dignity. I do not recognize the jurisdiction of the court, as you know, but Wolfram and you will do your best. You are not to blame. I am ready to endure everything that comes to me. I would also prefer to be free, I don't want to go back to this hell of concrete and steel, you can believe me, but sometimes you have to suffer in order to be able to enjoy true freedom."

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The court hearing continued on time. First, the head of the SfS was questioned, whose testimony, hardly surprising, agreed with that of witness Schwamm. Judge Freising then spoke to the Justice Secretary, who was sitting on the far right:

"Please call the next witness, Mr. Rittmeister."

"Mr. Rittmeister, please come to the courtroom. Mr. Rittmeister, please."

Hans Rittmeister entered. He looked around the room. His eyes rested on Hardenberg, who returned the gaze impressive and confident. He had seen Hardenberg after the storming of the apartment, but Hardenberg had not seen him. The tinted windows of the limousine did their job. Almost a year later, Rittmeister was no less impressed. Hardenberg's clothing did the

rest, but Rittmeister was certain: Even if Hardenberg would only appear in prison uniform, he would have been able to dominate the entire courtroom with his presence and authority without difficulty.

"Please take the stand, Mr. Rittmeister. I hardly have to instruct you because you are an old hand. Because of your secret service position, we can also do without the personal data. Since the victim, agent Schwamm, was in your department and you were commissioned by the Ministry of the Interior to monitor the operation, I expect precise reports in order to shed light on the matter."

Rittmeister testified about the preparations before the operation, the important position of Schwamm within the BFP, of the valuable findings of his undercover work and about the concern for the well-being of the infiltrated investigator. Rittmeister was well prepared, like everyone who would have to testify as a witness, but he was the one who was probably the most opposed. He almost felt sick.

He had quit the service at the BfV, in mutual consent, as it was officially, and he owed nothing to the BfV, but an incomprehensible remnant of Nibelung loyalty had remained. He did not want to fully expose the services he once believed in. They should do that themselves. In a way, he was also grateful that the BfV had not put any stones in his way.

His work in the last months of his leadership left a lot to be desired. The special "Mole" unit did not provide any valuable information. At least none that Rittmeister would have forwarded. The process of re-thinking had begun months ago.

The chief prosecutor turned to Rittmeister, who was just adjusting his dark red tie:

"Mr. Rittmeister, this is a serious accusation, including torture and much worse. Can you confirm that Thorsten Schwamm was found severely abused in the BFP's conspiratorial apartment?"

"No. I accompanied the operation, but remained outside the house with the command center. After the raid and securing, Schwamm was immediately taken away by officers from the Sfs and taken to the hospital."

"But you know the operational facts?"

"Yes, all the details were discussed during the debriefing. Among other things, I was shown the first photographs from the hospital."

"As an intelligence officer with many years of experience, I ask you whether this level of physical injury suggests torture-like mistreatment?"

"I consider this assessment to be justifiable."

"Do you think the fractures and hematomas that Schwamm had were self-inflicted?"

"I can rule that out with almost absolute certainty," Rittmeister forced himself to recite.

"Do you think it's possible that SEK officers or others accidentally, in the heat of the moment, injured the undercover investigator in this way?"

"I consider that completely out of the question!"

"Me too, also because Mr. Hardenberg wasn't injured—apart from a few abrasions. Do you know whether the defendant resisted?"

"The commander confirmed that this was not the case. Despite the storming, the smoke and flash grenades, and the swift physical arrest, Hardenberg sat calmly and unmoved by the fireplace and allowed himself to be arrested without resistance. His weapon was unloaded and clearly displayed out of reach. Hardenberg also attended the opening of the provisional arrest warrant and the order to search his house with composure."

"Are you suggesting that Hardenberg might have known about the operation?"

"There's no evidence for that, but I don't want to rule it out completely," said Rittmeister. It wasn't until years later, in a luxurious inn in Switzerland, that he learned the truth.

"Thank you, Mr. Rittmeister. "

Now lawyer Glowania took the initiative for the defense:

"Mr. Rittmeister, was Thorsten Schwamm kidnapped by my client or the co-accused?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"The prosecutor's office speaks of 'kidnapping.' Can you rule this out as convincingly as other theories of the Chief Public Prosecutor?"

"Yes."

"Yes., what?"

"Yes, I can rule out that Thorsten Schwamm has been kidnapped."

"Did he enter the apartment in question through threat of violence or coercion?"

"I can rule that out too, given the circumstances."

"Were you present when Sven Hardenberg was taken from the apartment?"

"No, as I said, I was with the operations command, but within sight of the target building."

"Did you see Thorsten Schwamm after the *liberation*?"

"Yes, when he was quickly escorted out by the SfS officers."

"Did you notice any injuries on him?"

"Schwamm was wrapped in a blanket, probably due to the cold. The darkness made it impossible to get a good look at him." Glowania prepared to use his defensive trump card.

"Mr. Rittmeister, as I see it, the only charge remaining is assault. Therefore, I need your expert opinion as a 'long-time intelligence officer,' as Dr. Kaufmann rightly emphasized." Glowania was in full swing and received a slight nod from his prominent colleague—he should continue and try to invalidate the main charge:

"The written records of the operation show that the traitor, excuse me, undercover agent Schwamm, was taken from the apartment into a waiting SUV of the SfS at 6:50 a.m. Can you confirm this time?"

Rittmeister leafed through his own notes unnecessarily and allowed himself a moment to reflect. The defense's insight was remarkable. They were on the right track and were probably close to highlighting the only weak point in the agreed statements.

"6:50 a.m. Yes, I can confirm that, but it was more like a minibus."

"I understand. Did the vehicle leave immediately?"

"According to my records? Yes."

"Do you know a little about Berlin's traffic?" Glowania asked mischievously.

"A little."

"Do you remember which hospital Schwamm was taken to?"

"The agent was taken to the Berlin Charité hospital in the Wedding district."

"To the emergency room of the clinic?"

"It can be assumed."

"Do you remember the name of the attending physician at the emergency room?"

"Unfortunately not, but it can certainly be quickly researched," replied Rittmeister maliciously.

"We already have, Mr. Rittmeister, we already have." Dr. Paasche handed his colleague a document.

"Can you roughly estimate how far the Charité emergency room is from the scene of the operation?"

"Maybe eight to nine kilometers ..."

"Just under ten. A maximum travel time of fifteen minutes in traffic that certainly wasn't excessive that morning. There were no accidents or traffic light failures. We have the daily report from the responsible traffic department," said Glowania, leafing through the file. "In the entries from the SfS, we can read that

Schwamm was admitted to the emergency room at the Charité Berlin 'at approximately 7:10 a.m.' Can you confirm that?"

"Unfortunately not, because, as you know, I wasn't on site in this case either." Rittmeister briefly thought about the nausea he had felt as he watched Schwamm being brutally beaten by 'unofficial collaborators.' He didn't go to the hospital; he couldn't, not even later, because he had always been aware of his guilt.

The defense attorney further asked:

"You stayed on site to oversee the further operation?"

"Yes."

"Is that what your records say?"

"Sure."

"It's strange, because you're not mentioned anywhere else, but my real concern is the travel time..."

"That's not just what my notes say; I was in a vehicle on the scene," Rittmeister interrupted the lawyer, somewhat annoyed. It was time to show the defense their limits.

"In *your* vehicle?"

"No."

"Alone?"

"No!"

"Would you please be so kind as to tell us with whom you spent this unpleasant December morning?" Glowania asked, still emphatically friendly, although one could detect a slight irritation in his words due to Rittmeister's monosyllabic answers.

"With a female journalist who had permission from the Ministry of the Interior to accompany the action."

"And what is this lady's name?" the defense attorney asked again.

"If I remember correctly, her name was von Hagen—Dagmar von Hagen."

"Yes, we will question Miss von Hagen later."

"I'm beginning to sense your deceitful tactics!" said Dr. Kaufmann indignantly, but not very authentically.

"I am convinced of that, honored colleague, because you don't have to be a genius to sense this swamp of lies..."

"That is an infamous insinuation!"

"Gentlemen, I expect continued objectivity," Judge Freising admonished, indicating to Glowania that he should continue.

"Mr. Rittmeister, if I told you that the SfS brought Schwamm, who according to the files was seriously injured, to the hospital much later, would that surprise you as an experienced officer who also worked in the field?"

"Not necessarily. It had snowed and the roads were difficult to drive on."

"Correct, that's why we have a report on this—my colleague should submit it now—which proves that all main roads to the hospital were cleared before 7:00 a.m. There were no traffic obstructions whatsoever. Can you imagine that a special unit with blue lights flashing took an hour or more to cover 10 kilometers?"

"Only with utmost difficulty."

"Same here, but it's true. The admissions nurse can testify as a witness if necessary that Mr. Schwamm was admitted severely injured and unconscious at 7:55 a.m. I would like your opinion—as an expert, of course."

"The lady may have made a mistake."

Glowania was handed another document from his colleague. "It's written here in black and white, signed by the attending physician, Dr. Wegener. Can you at least agree with me that this discrepancy in timing is highly unusual?"

"I agree with you: unusual and regrettable, but mistakes can never be ruled out."

"You're right, Mr. Rittmeister, and in this case, the error lies in the details, and those details can be far-reaching. One last question: Why aren't you with the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution anymore?"

Rittmeister looked up in astonishment and hissed with a sniff:

"I don't think this belongs here."

"Please answer the question, Mr. Rittmeister," said Judge Freising with a hint of curiosity.

"I could no longer represent my actions with the BfV—neither to myself nor to others."

"Please explain that."

"I increasingly hated my duty, I simply saw too much."

"For example?"

Rittmeister thought for a moment and adjusted his white pocket square. No one at the BfV had forbidden him to talk about his departure—and he didn't mind giving them a piece of his mind.

"The surprise arrests late at night, the secret, brutal interrogations, the sloppy presentation of evidence in courts that led to unjustified verdicts, and the often unfounded arrest warrants—initialed by well-meaning judges. We make enemies where there are none. We create chaos in order to then put the world back in order. Our enemies of yesterday are our friends of today. And no matter which way you look at it, we're always called. What does that have to do with the rule of law? Nothing! Do you want more examples, Mr. Defense Attorney?"

"Thank you, I have no further questions for you," said Glowania, highly satisfied.

Rittmeister was dismissed; a sense of bewilderment spread throughout the courtroom, and the impression of inconsistency remained. But that wouldn't be enough if the other witnesses couldn't be cracked. The defense knew this and had to realize that the representatives of the Sfs had been excellently prepared. Despite repeated warnings, there was no breakthrough.

Dagmar von Hagen was the last witness to take the stand. She looked beautiful in her light-colored suit. As she sat down, the gentlemen were able to admire her flawless legs thanks to the sheer pantyhose—and they did so at length.

"Miss von Hagen, did you understand the court instructions you just received?"

"Yes."

"How did you get the opportunity to participate in the operation?"

"I'm friends with the head of the Public Relations Department at the Ministry of the Interior. As German federal authorities increasingly advocate for greater transparency toward citizens, we in the writing profession are increasingly given the opportunity to accompany law enforcement officers in their work."

"Which news agency do you work for?"

"For all of them. I'm a freelance writer and enjoy a certain reputation in journalistic circles."

"Were you not surprised that you were allowed to accompany such a delicate mission?"

"Yes, extremely. But I was also happy. That's quite different than escorting two patrol officers handing out tickets."

"Can you say something about the defendants?"

"Only about Hardenberg. He's obviously a well-known and impressive figure. I've often tried to find out more, but he refuses to cooperate with media representatives."

Dagmar von Hagen looked to her left and fixed her gaze on Hardenberg, who returned her deep look and saw that there was more to it than journalistic curiosity. Because of his intense and appraising stare, she suddenly found it difficult to concentrate on the next question. However, she managed to turn her attention back to the judge.

"Miss von Hagen, did you see Hardenberg on the morning of the apartment raid?"

Dagmar von Hagen glanced briefly in his direction again, almost frantically trying not to lose herself in his incredible eyes again. She thought of his proud bearing when he was led out onto the street and to the waiting car almost a year ago. Since that day, her thoughts occasionally lingered on him.

"Yes, when he was taken away."

"Did you see the victim, Thorsten Schwamm, at that time?"

"Yes, but I didn't know it was him at the time. He had a blanket over his head. It happened very quickly. Later that morning, during the debriefing, I was told who that was and what had supposedly happened."

"You emphasize *presumably*, are there reasons for this?"

"Well, Mr. Chairman, I'm a journalist and I've seen and experienced a lot. For me, something is only a fact when it's proven."

"For example, in court?!"

"Please forgive me, Mr. Chairman, but I have experienced too many miscarriages of justice to say that a court's ruling would be enough for me."

The room became restless. Hardenberg raised an eyebrow in recognition of this unexpectedly frank confession and nodded slightly in agreement.

"Thank you for your candor. Are there any further questions for the witness?" The presiding judge looked around.

"No," replied the chief prosecutor.

"Well, I have a question, Miss von Hagen," attorney Glowania said. "Where were you during the operation?"

"In my vehicle within the police cordon."

"Were you alone?"

She had been waiting for this question and was prepared. She had been warned: If she didn't cover for Rittmeister, she would never receive a permit from any public institution again. She hadn't suspected why she had to lie, but a residue of ambition, of professional greed, prompted her to take this step. She had heard the most outrageous rumors about Rittmeister. He was burned out and dangerous, he was helping the other side, and even worse stories, but her obligation to testify remained the same.

"No. A senior BfV official was sitting in my vehicle. His name is Rittmeister—Hans Rittmeister."

"How long was Rittmeister with you?"

"Until the end, we drove back to headquarters together."

Attorney Glowania and Dr. Paasche tried not to let their disappointment show. The last straw sank in the wake of the

vanished, disenchanted Justice—in the face of the depths of the mire, hypocrisy had apparently prevailed.

Dagmar von Hagen was dismissed and sought eye contact with Hardenberg one last time, wishing she could bestow courage and strength upon him. Something about his manner, his attitude, and his actions irresistibly attracted her, but she couldn't quite put her finger on it. She felt guilty, but there was undeniably more, and that frightened her, even more: it excited her ...

"To my great surprise, we're done with the witnesses. It's now 1:00 p.m. We're taking a one-hour lunch break. Are the lawyers prepared for closing arguments, or do we need a second day of trial, which would be expensive for the taxpayer?" Judge Freising asked hopefully.

Chief Public Prosecutor Dr. Kaufmann looked up. He occasionally peered into the rows of press representatives who were diligently taking notes but frequently shaking their heads. This should have been a major case, but this "uprising of decency" had degenerated into a farce. He already deeply regretted having usurped this charge. He sensed the tenor of the next day's newspaper articles. This farce had to end today.

"If the defense attorneys have no objections, I agree."

"We do too, Mr. Chairman, but we request an extension of the midday break, as we would like to see you in the judge's chambers after lunch."

"Then at two in my room, the hearing continues at two-thirty. Any questions? Motions? None? Enjoy your meal!"

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At 2 p.m., Sven Hardenberg was taken back upstairs; the others were already waiting with the presiding judge and his associate judge, but without the two lay judges. Hardenberg had consulted with his defense attorneys during the recess and had made a decision. Freising gave him the floor.

"My comrades and I have been in custody for almost eleven months. I have regrettably had to realize that my friends are suffering, and these hardships must now stop—I, and only I, bear the undoubted responsibility. However, I emphasize that I did not harm Thorsten Schwamm. Why he is lying, I do not know, but he has proven that he can lie for over a year as an undercover agent, traitor, insurgent, and agitator, and he was nevertheless subsidized by the state. This trial has degenerated into a political issue, and the forces demanding a conviction seem overwhelming. In my former Red Army Fraction solitary cell on the seventh floor of the Stuttgart-Stammheim prison, I still had hope. The complete harassment, 23 hours a day, hundreds of kilometers south of my home and family, could not discourage me. The 'yard walk' in the solitary cage on the roof did not make me despair, nor did the fact that only my lawyers, due to the contact ban, was allowed to visit, but now it's time to draw a line under it!"

Hardenberg took a deep breath and continued:

"Mr. Chairman, gentlemen, I am prepared to accept any punishment and to begin my political imprisonment without complaint if I am assured that my co-defendants, my friends, who merely carried out my instructions, will be exonerated. Collective punishment must be avoided. I expect the proceedings to be dropped and, if necessary, compensation for their imprisonment. In return, after the verdict is announced, I will publicly accept the punishment, waive any right of appeal, and thus ensure legal validity. You have thus achieved my social ostracism; please be content with that." Hardenberg sat down after his brief remarks.

"I want ten years of incarceration for Hardenberg...!" raged the public prosecutor.

"That's *Mr. Hardenberg*, *Mr. colleague!*" exclaimed Attorney Glowania.

"As I said, ten years for aggravated assault, false imprisonment, threats, coercion, and illegal possession of weapons. Given his military and combat history, I consider Mr. Hardenberg a

danger to the public and am considering a request for preventive detention."

"Are you still in your right mind?" asked the agitated Glowania.

He was immediately appeased by Dr. Paasche, who took over the negotiations:

"Mr. Chairman, Mr. Colleague, the situation is different than it was at the beginning. There was neither a kidnapping nor a joint, let alone *organized*, act, so this case is on shaky ground, and you know that, *dear* Dr. Kaufmann. We now have the opportunity to end this matter before it becomes even more embarrassing. Mr. Hardenberg is ready to give in, even though we advised against it. My colleague and I are of the opinion that this matter stinks to high heaven, to say the least. The public prosecutor wants a political conviction, and we believe that terrible methods were used to destroy Mr. Hardenberg and his BFP. This cannot be proven, however; the wall of silence is tight. But when you, Dr. Kaufmann, talk about ten years and preventive detention, then I get angry, and I rarely get angry. If you want a confrontation in public, then we will go to the courtroom today, tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, and so on, and chew everything over until nothing is left. Then I will have every nurse, every doctor, every traffic cop, and so on testify, even if it may not achieve anything. I most reluctantly raise my voice, but now I expect reasonable concessions and realistic proposals, otherwise we can call it quits immediately!" Dr. Paasche looked around and made it clear that, even in his old age, he had not forgotten how to fight. Wolfram Glowania regarded his esteemed colleague with admiration and respect.

"Well, gentlemen, I can only say this much, and I'm sure I also speak for my associate judge and colleague, that a sentence of ten years sounds extremely fantastic. That's not possible in this case. The witnesses' statements were largely credible. While I consider the bodily harm to be serious, the remaining offenses are only minor, and I advise you, Dr. Kaufmann, to prepare for a max-

imum of five years. I would support the dismissal of the proceedings against the co-defendants, also because the evidence appears more than meager," said Judge Freising.

Chief Public Prosecutor Dr. Kaufmann capitulated and returned to reason: "I agree with you, Mr. Chairman, and trust your judgment."

The entire time his fate and future were being debated in his presence, Hardenberg sat silently, trying to come to terms with the inevitable fact. He had fought for high and honorable goals and would now be severely punished—with the loss of his freedom.

Thus, the hearing was nearing its conclusion. The lawyers delivered their closing arguments. Attorney Glowania explicitly emphasized the discrepancy in the stated timescales leading up to Schwamm's admission to the Charité hospital, although he suspected that Sven Hardenberg's fate was sealed. The senior public prosecutor's closing statement, in contrast, was particularly timid.

Hardenberg's parents protested boldly and audibly against the chief public prosecutor's repeated outrageous allegations, while a 94-year-old former Wehrmacht officer, Knight's Cross recipient, and honorary member of the BFP stood up, walked forward with crutches, and attempted to present Hardenberg with his badge of honor, but this was rudely prevented by the bailiffs and almost triggered a mass brawl in the courtroom.

The court sentenced Sven Hardenberg "in the name of the people" to four years and nine months in prison. His friends and co-defendants were acquitted as agreed. At the subsequent press conference, the successful senior prosecutor hailed a "victory for democracy" even as Hardenberg was led into the cold, damp basement of the courthouse before his return flight.

***“The greatest evil in recorded human history
is the disgusting, murderous
anti-Germanism of the 20th century!”***

The Order

Hans Rittmeister slowed down, the roar of his 911's engine with its large turbocharger noticeably subsided, and the *Feuerzauber* from the "The Ring of the Nibelung" could be heard again from the expensive speakers, although he preferred to enjoy the music of this sports car at top speed. Unfortunately, there was a speed limit in France. He felt young again, but also a little tired. The December night was unusually mild, the lights of the French autobahn, as usual, bright, and the well-maintained roads almost empty.

He had turned up the temperature of the automatic climate control and enjoyed the mix of warm, heated air and the cool breeze that filtered in freely through the open windows. The leather smelled wonderful in the almost brand-new car, and the seats were very comfortable, something that had only become commonplace at Porsche in recent years. Only the numerous toll booths were a nuisance, artificially interrupting the flow of the sparse traffic.

He appreciated this southern route to Spain: crossing the border near Mulhouse, then to Marseille. Here he had to drive into the city, because the motorway ran right through it. He made good progress. He preferred it that way. Rittmeister knew this Moloch from his time in the intelligence service, and this metropolis was dirty and dangerous, yet perfectly suited to the old business in the shadows of the real world. This dubious parallel existed between espionage and prostitution: a lot of money for betrayal and illusion.

As he reached the Spanish border, it gradually became lighter. He could already smell the pleasant salty sea air. When he saw the

large bull, which seemed to rise from a mountain, proudly watching over the land and the approaching holidaymakers, he knew the coast was near. The oversized advertising structure for a high-proof bottle was the signal for many travelers that their vacation had begun. But Hans Rittmeister wasn't on a "vacation," he was on a business trip—he just didn't know whether he would be suitor or harlot in this *business*.

A few weeks ago, he had fulfilled his duty for the last time, on behalf of his former employer, and played the expected role. His testimony contributed significantly to the conviction of political activist Sven Hardenberg. Rittmeister often thought of this young, strong, likeable man, who had behaved so bravely and unyieldingly in court. His feelings of guilt grew immeasurably.

Immediately after Hardenberg's arrest almost exactly a year ago, he was instructed, as announced, to establish a special unit to arrest so-called "moles" at the FEDERAL OFFICE FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE CONSTITUTION (BfV) and other government agencies. Before doing so, he had to establish the framework for Thorsten Schwamm's inclusion in the federal witness protection program. Once the informant had left the country, he was able to close the file, which he was more than happy to do. He took up his new post on 2 January.

The transcripts of the conversations that led to Schwamm's exposure presented the agency with a tricky task. Rittmeister was tasked with finding out who was passing on such confidential information—the public and the many employees, however, were not allowed to get wind of it. Secrecy was the top priority, which also explained why Rittmeister was appointed department head. He was given every conceivable authority, and his special unit, known from then on only as the "Rittmeister Group," was completely self-sufficient and accountable to no one. The president of the BfV demanded only results. Records were avoided,

and the employees were hand-picked. Rittmeister, who would have preferred to resign after the fiasco surrounding the Hardenberg affair, actually enjoyed the new role. As a senior commanding officer and field agent, he preferred deployment to the front.

It didn't take long for Rittmeister to receive the first indications that there were numerous government officials who were deeply dissatisfied with the development of everyday politics in the Federal Republic. They formed a loose but powerful network throughout Germany and used it to influence certain processes. Open intervention was deliberately avoided. They primarily controlled and served national-liberal and conservative initiatives.

The old and new enemy of the FRG authorities were all initiatives and individuals who described themselves or behaved as German nationalists and were unwilling to silently endure the sell-out of the fatherland. These organizations, as well as individual campaigners, were to be supported. From the low-level police officer to the middle-ranking civil servant to the prominent politician, everyone was represented. Rittmeister had learned all this by chance, as an official under surveillance who had aroused suspicion was encountered at the annual meeting of a powerful, nationalistic society for journalists in the magnificent Saxon Switzerland.

During an interrogation, while still in his hotel room, he broke down and began to babble. The family man was a man of conviction, but when it came to his future, he weakened. When he indicated that he could spill the beans, Rittmeister ordered the other officials to leave the room—due to the essential secrecy. The exposed officer talked everything off his chest and was sworn to secrecy by Rittmeister. He was neither arrested nor taken away, but instead was immediately indebted to the group leader.

Rittmeister carefully led this officer and collected more and more names. He visited them all personally, without an escort. Some were stubborn and revealed nothing, but most testified. And always they were only conscripted. Rittmeister talked with many of them for hours to learn their motives. Again and again, he had to recognize that these were honest, compassionate, and brave patriots who were taking a great risk for the good of the German people. They didn't do it for money, as defectors and informers do; they did it for their homeland and knew very well that the price could be very high and that thanks would probably be lacking.

It wasn't long before the former spy was convinced of the honor and significant fairness of their actions, and he himself became their champion. For the first time in his life, he could fully support a cause, as if his destiny had finally revealed itself to him. Since only he knew the names of the numerous civil servants, they were protected, sheltered. These patriots were now the *true* Rittmeister Group. His behavior caught the attention of the other officials in his department, and naturally, the President of the BfV learned of it. At the end of July, seven months after his appointment as department head, Rittmeister was placed on leave. He could only avoid legal action by giving his agreed-upon testimony in court to the detriment of Hardenberg. Now he was free and unfettered, and thus he could best act, like an independent reconnaissance patrol behind enemy lines. They tried to shadow him, but it was an unequal test of strength or rather cunning and boldness.

One of his *agents*, as he liked to call them, sent him a message two weeks ago: It concerned a secret society called THE COMING ONES, which had contacted Rittmeister through this agent. This order was familiar to Rittmeister, but more of a myth within intelligence circles. Whenever inexplicable events were to be excused, the response was: "That was definitely THE COMING ONES!"

The otherwise reliable agent, a department head at the FEDERAL CRIMINAL POLICE OFFICE (BKA), refused to give Rittmeister any details. He would only say this: The order had requested a meeting that could positively influence and favor the future of the Rittmeister Group. He was supposed to travel to Spain, near Marbella, but this had changed at short notice. Rittmeister was intrigued, but managed to suppress this natural feeling. Since the order obviously knew about the Rittmeister Group's efforts and at least knew the identity of one agent, Rittmeister assumed that these secret forces knew more, or even everything. Therefore, it was his duty to attend the meeting, even if it meant disregarding all security concerns. He had already taken precautions months ago in case he should *disappear* inexplicably.

The sign appeared shortly after the last toll booth: Lloret de Mar. This was where he was intended to exit the motorway and glide down the scenic mountain road into the valley toward the coast. Halfway down, the first glimpse of the sea opened up. He quickly parked the sports car from Zuffenhausen in a small lay-by and enjoyed the horizon, which was greeted with a morning embrace by the sunlight, still surprisingly strong for this time of year. He remembered that there was snow on the ground in his homeland.

Lloret de Mar was a small town at the foot of an insignificant mountain range. The beach lay between two rocks, like a haven of peace and security. The city fathers strove to keep the town hall and the old castle in top condition, but the general impression of the town was that of an elderly whore. Small "hostals," dirty house facades, modern dance halls—it was a city of pleasure and vice, primarily for vacationers from England, Germany, Holland, Italy, and France between the ages of 16 and 26, who let themselves be beguiled by all sorts of magic in the brightly lit nights of glitter and juggling, were broke after a week

of alcohol, drugs, and free love at the latest, and eagerly awaited the departure of the tour bus on the last day.

Only in winter did the Mediterranean coastal town seem to allow itself a restful sleep. Most of the shops were closed, the hotels were shut, and the countless police officers and inspectors from the high season, on loan from all over Spain, were back in their home stations. This was the time of the retirees and pensioners. They could be seen everywhere on the enchanting promenade between the town hall and the castle, beneath the majestic palm trees. They barely glanced at the deserted beach and the sea, preferring to go to the shops for souvenirs and gifts or from café to bar, sipping cocktails at reduced prices in winter, speaking about the pain in their joints, and talking about the adventurous youth they so desperately longed for. The expensive LACOSTE or RALPH LAUREN sweater, thrown on because of the chilly weather, the sunglasses always at hand, the numerous gold bracelets constantly flashing, and the obligatory sandals revealing the immaculately clean, white, thick cotton tennis socks—they were happy and had every right to be. Rittmeister observed the scene with suspicion, fearing for the first time this death by installments. He had a different exit in mind.

He was supposed to report to the four-star Hotel VILA DEL MAR, where a small suite had been reserved in his name. The hotel made a good impression and was located less than fifty meters from the beach. The rooms and the staff were discreet and pleasant. After a smooth check-in, his first step was to examine the rooms in the surprisingly spacious suite—cameras and listening devices would have been discovered by him, but he could rest assured. Now it was the others' turn. It wasn't yet 9:00 a.m., and the receptionist, a nice but *lukewarm brother* who spoke excellent German, had offered him breakfast upstairs with a smile. By "upstairs" he meant an impressive roof terrace with a magnificent view of the sea and the winding canyons of buildings.

Tourists from numerous nations populated the tables and stood at the opulent buffet. Many languages could be heard, but one stood out clearly: Russian! He knew the language well, as well as the people, although he didn't particularly like them. As an agent, he had been to the former Soviet Union many times, and his experiences with the country and its people were any-thing but agreeable to him. If THE COMING ONES were made up of *Russkis*, then this would be a very short dialogue.

He had a hearty breakfast and treated himself to a last cup of coffee, while an elderly couple swam laps in the pool next to him. No one spoke to him, so he decided to go to sleep for a while. The gentlemen, whoever they were, would have to wait.

Late in the afternoon, the phone rang; a call was put through by reception. An unfamiliar male voice politely asked him to get into a vehicle waiting outside the hotel, which would take him to the selected meeting point. Rittmeister showered and dressed, checked his trusty WALTHER PPK, and took two full magazines out of his suitcase. He was always armed, even though he knew this arrangement put him at a distinct disadvantage. He left his room key and an addressed envelope at reception and quietly asked for it to be sent if he wasn't back by the following morning. The clerk showed no surprise, having already received other obscure requests—and the 10,000 Spanish peseta tip made any further enquiries superfluous.

A few meters from the hotel stood a MAYBACH SW 42. The beautiful six-seater convertible, built in 1939, was anything but inconspicuous. The pedestrian zone where his accommodation was located was off-limits. Rittmeister was impressed and waited for a reaction. The driver got out, doffed his cap, and opened the rear door of the exclusive limousine. Several onlookers had stopped to see which celebrity would be boarding. The camouflage was gone, if it had ever been intended. The specialist, Hans Rittmeister-

er, knew that the most secret operations often took place in public because that was when they were least expected. The enemy is more likely to spot what is hidden.

Rittmeister looked at the license plates and was surprised to spot Spanish diplomatic plates. Before getting in, he casually surveyed the surroundings. In a side street, the old expert spotted a black S-Class with tinted windows. He thought he recognized this sedan, as he had noticed one like it that morning at a Spanish rest stop. Despite his perfect eyesight, he could only make out the driver and passenger vaguely. He certainly didn't see the two men with the strikingly long, light hair in the back seat, nor their assault rifles from the southern part of the Remnant Reich, as the ORDER OF THE COMING ONES preferred to call the Federal Republic of Germany.

Rittmeister quickly realized that the peaceful journey was heading toward Barcelona. The driver remained silent, and the passenger enjoyed the luxury of the vehicle, remaining attentive and cautious. He even turned around occasionally, but the anticipated escort vehicle remained undetected. The MAYBACH was waved through at the usual toll booths. The large Catalan provincial capital, located between the coastal chain and the Mediterranean, was steadily approaching. First, they passed through the slums of the outlying districts with their countless prefabricated buildings, then to the artificial harbor in the old suburb with its famous landmark: the 60-meter-high Columbus Column. They drove onto the ring road that separated the new town from the old town, past the large "Rambla," a wide avenue lined with plane trees, lined with restaurants, flower and bird markets, and toward the cathedral. To the north, Rittmeister could make out the tower of the unfinished minor basilica "Sagrada Familia."

The oldest district, the "Barrio Gótico," with its many renovated houses and buildings from bygone glory days, opened up. Nu-

merous palaces were visible, and the limousine stopped in front of one of these imposing buildings. A guard greeted the driver and opened the grand iron gate. Not unexpectedly, the black S-Class with the famous star also appeared, following closely behind the MAYBACH. The expected guest from the north revealed a hidden grin.

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The half-blind house majordomo escorted Hans Rittmeister into the spacious library on the ground floor. He was invited to take a seat by the flickering fireplace, but he preferred to look around and admire the valuable book collection, with its many first editions. He also examined the enormous billiard table from the last century. It wasn't long before Rittmeister heard a faint mechanical squeak and froze slightly as an elderly, spry gentleman was wheeled into the library by the majordomo. Despite his disability, he was a stately, handsome figure. He greeted the impatiently and curiously waiting Rittmeister.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Rittmeister! It's a great honor to finally meet you in person—I've heard a lot about you."

"Mine, indeed, but with whom do I have the pleasure?"

"Please be seated, and I'll be happy to answer your questions in detail. You have every right to do so."

Rittmeister made himself comfortable. A young man stepped out of a dark niche: tall, silent, and carrying a silver tray. He had apparently been in the room the whole time, but Rittmeister hadn't noticed. This fact now annoyed him.

The old gentleman with light gray hair in an evening tuxedo turned to his guest again:

"Would you please give your handgun, which is under your jacket, to Max?"

"How did you know that?"

"The MAYBACH is equipped with a detector. You do not have any radio- or battery-controlled equipment with you. You will receive your weapon back upon departure. I regret the inconve-

nience, but trust is good, control is better—this is by no means mere polemic, but a necessity in our business."

Rittmeister felt the handle of the WALTHER with two fingers of his right hand, slowly pulled it from the shoulder holster, and placed it on the dinner tray. He sat to the left of the fire and looked around more closely in the semidarkness. All the windows were covered with long, heavy curtains that reached to the floor. Behind him was an exit covered by a red plush curtain. He thought he had caught a glimpse of movement behind it and assumed that one or more bodyguards were waiting there. The old gentleman clapped his hands once, and a Dutch valet brought a decanter and glasses.

"Surely you like vintage wine, Mr. Rittmeister? My own cultivation, if you don't mind. You'll agree with me that there are only three ways to truly get to know a person: through love, gambling, and wine."

"I have to agree with you. I'd love to treat myself to a glass. Where is this vineyard?"

"But, Mr. Rittmeister, I beg you."

"Fair enough, but it was worth a try. It should also be obvious that you don't live here, otherwise you wouldn't have let me come here so openly. Still, I won't ask where you live."

"Very accommodating, Mr. Rittmeister!"

The very old gentleman's gentleman, a former member of the volunteer SS "Wiking" division, filled the glasses. Rittmeister's mouth had gone dry from the tension, but he waited until the host took the first sip of the formidable vintage. In the firelight, he saw the scar on his right cheek, which began just below his eye and continued down to his chin. He examined the collection of weapons on the long wall behind his host and recognized the fencing sabers.

The old gentleman, who studied Rittmeister with his piercing eyes, was well aware that his counterpart would only drink the wine after tasting it himself. Old habits and constant skepticism

simply wouldn't die. He knew that all too well. So he raised his glass and tasted the fine wine, then addressed his guest:

"Mr. Rittmeister, my name is Kurt Steinbauer. I am the master of a secret society you may be familiar with, 73 years old, and, as you can see, paralyzed from the waist down after an accident."

The order's master did not tell him about his time as the youngest member of the GEHLEN ORGANISATION or about his missions in the Eastern Zone in 1954 to free Western agents. He also did not tell him about his father, who had impregnated his mother during his *Sturm und Drang period*, but was only allowed to confess his love for him in the final years of the last Great War; his father, the "Ostmärker" and convinced Greater German, head of Group VI S, who was taken prisoner in May 1945 and, despite the postwar turmoil, his escape to Buenos Aires, then the Costa del Sol and Madrid, always supported and encouraged his illegitimate son, among other things, enabling him to study in Vienna. After his father's death in Madrid in July 1975, his old comrades buried his ashes in that great city on the beautiful, blue Danube. Furthermore, he didn't tell Rittmeister about the Bolshevik bullet that tore through his spine and forever buried his great desire for his own children. That's why he loved the blond youth standing behind the curtain like a son. The thriving warrior was forced to wear earplugs for the sake of secrecy, but nevertheless, he would not hesitate, upon an agreed-upon hand signal, to instantly eliminate the German guest if he didn't comply with his master's wishes.

"Well, Mr. Steinbauer, I'm familiar with THE COMING ONES, but I don't know any concrete details, which is certainly your intention. It's suspected that your organization has the status of a Masonic lodge. I'm not exactly young anymore, and I'm surprised that I, an old hand in my field, have only now experienced such an encounter. I have countless questions, which should not surprise you. For example, why do you reside in Barcelona and have a vehicle with Spanish diplomatic license plates?"

"Mr. Rittmeister, there's an old soldier's saying: 'A soldier waits in vain for half his life.' Perhaps your time for waiting is over. Leave that to providence," the old man said without haste. "Your questions are understandable, but we must first clarify certain formalities. Just this much: We are certainly not Freemasons, and we most certainly do not wear funny hats or carnival costumes. Have you noticed your pursuers?"

"Which pursuers?"

"Former colleagues of yours. From Ulm onwards, you were followed by a minibus." Rittmeister suppressed his surprise and remarked appreciatively:

"I made several detours and thought I had lost any potential pursuers—I must have trained my boys too well!"

"Obviously yes! But don't worry—right after the Spanish border, when you last refueled, it was made unmistakably clear to those gentlemen that it would be better to abort the mission. They'll never bother you again, Mr. Rittmeister."

Hans Rittmeister knew what this last statement meant.

"I wonder if they've attached a tracking device to my vehicle?" he muttered, as if to himself.

"Doubtful. You have a newly introduced navigation system."

"Yes, but of course it wasn't in operation."

"Unfortunately, that's not enough. It's almost like with cell phones. Even when turned off, depending on your operating system, you can still be tracked via satellite, because the GPS modem is always ready to receive."

"I didn't know that, I'm probably not that familiar with the technical innovations anymore, but I know my business inside out."

"We know and trust that, Mr. Rittmeister, and that's why our people value you so highly as an intelligence expert. *Ex ungue leonem*—you can tell a lion by its claws."

"I guess I'll have to cut the connecting cable."

"No need for that! While we speak, your sports car is being upgraded in your hotel's off-site underground parking garage. You will receive an interrupter that blocks radio waves on demand." Rittmeister decided to learn more about new satellite tracking systems in the future.

"Mr. Rittmeister, I am well aware of the activities of your group. Would you please tell me something about your career and your assessment of the German security services? We are safe here and have no listeners."

And so he talked about himself, outlined his career, and correctly assumed that THE COMING ONES were largely aware of this. He also reported on the true main goal of the secret services: namely, to spread disinformation. This *art* was primarily used in the fight against patriotic organizations. The post-war intelligence community of Germany planted informants to expose them. In most cases, the services knew there was no useful information to be gathered, but their goal was more to sow distrust within the organizations. Accordingly, these groups remained small and isolated, increasingly afraid of traitors. The small groups therefore avoided supra-regional contacts and, due to their ineffectiveness, posed no threat to the authoritarian state. Only when the secret agents received orders from those in political power did they invent or initiate a potential threat in order to incite the media and the public and to keep the annual budget of the unmanageable agency consistently high. In this case, the secret society of Hardenberg was an exception, for the goal of the BFP was to achieve national and international unity, something that not only the BfV was determined to prevent.

The old man listened carefully and liked what he heard. Steinbauer admired the experienced ex-agent's candor and insight. He also sensed, however, that Rittmeister still felt great remorse for Sven Hardenberg's imprisonment. He could have reassured him, but Rittmeister still lacked the necessary trust: The order had

known about the events and had followed them closely, yet allowed Hardenberg's arrest and conviction. This test had been planned by the order, for the secret society had objectives that were not to be discussed further at this time.

Steinbauer placed his trust in Rittmeister and was also candid. The Gnostic recounted a little of the order's history and its ancient wisdom—the tradition of which dates back to antiquity—the essential selection based on trustworthy convictions, and also the members' legitimate claim to infinite rule, based on their superior knowledge and spiritual power. He revealed the fact that there were thirteen Masters, one of whom was chosen as the order's spokesman and leader—this father was called "Thurisaz" or sometimes "Thornuz" within secret rites: the giant among the wise, the first among the first.

The *father* explained to Rittmeister in detail why THE COMING ONES sought close cooperation with the Rittmeister Group. Since the order had been hidden for too long and too deeply, it now wanted to use the Rittmeister Group to exert direct influence on events in its old, beloved homeland. Rittmeister's agents guaranteed this. His group would not only receive money and technical support, but the entire power structure of the order would be at Rittmeister's free disposal. It was this influence that could facilitate and pave the way for the group. Furthermore, it was planned to ask Rittmeister to provide instruction in intelligence tactics to the order's junior executives. This training would be generously compensated.

When Kurt Steinbauer finished and evening inevitably fell, a second jug of wine was served. Rittmeister realized that he was ready to work with the order. He felt honored by the great trust he believed was placed in him. He revealed this to the old order's leader, who looked visibly satisfied and relaxed. Rittmeister confessed that he felt released from the oath of loyalty to the Federal

Republic of Germany that his military youth had sworn, and that from then on, his commitment was unconditionally to the German people.

"You know, Mr. Rittmeister, we expected this reaction, but I would nevertheless like to express our sincere gratitude to you on behalf of the Masters. I understand your concerns about Hardenberg. We will gladly support him on your behalf after his release, just as we do with the BFP."

"I accept your thanks and your offer with humility, but I must confess that I am not doing this for you or your organization, but solely for the good of the fatherland and the people."

"We would have expected nothing less. When can we expect a list of your agents' names?"

"Not at all. I am your exclusive contact. The names are and will remain confidential, as I am obligated to these daring patriots. It's a matter of honor, and I would rather die than reveal them."

"And of course it's a question of personal safety," said the old man with a look of respect.

"Naturally!"

"We in the order also agree to this understanding."

"What would have happened if I had refused?"

"Then today would have been your last day. That's why it wasn't a daring feat for me to tell you everything. But you'll know that from your time in the secret service, Mr. Rittmeister. Whoever isn't with us is against us. You'll certainly understand that."

Hans Rittmeister was understanding and welcomed the order's consistent professionalism. He was given two telephone numbers for emergencies. One was in Barcelona, the other number belonged to a small hunting lodge on Schwanenwerder, a historic island in the Havel River off the Wannsee Bay near Berlin. If he had known that THE COMING ONES were considering eliminating Sven Hardenberg's family in order to eliminate the vulnerable weakness of a family bond and thus completely bind the desired future leader to the most surreptitious order, he might have been less zealous.

***“The spiritual victory over the enemy
is the climax of war.”***

The Fortress

The first night as a now officially convicted prisoner was depressing, but the terror that had initially weighed on him like a heavy burden had since subsided. The return flight to Stuttgart-Stammheim had taken place late in the afternoon of his Berlin trial. After almost a year of pretrial detention in almost complete isolation, the new situation seemed like a relief. He finally had certainty. Now things could only get better. Hardenberg had become more serene and very tough. Not even he would have expected to be able to muster this severity of unlimited contempt for the system—and not just outwardly. Hatred can be a powerful weapon: a bracing corset, a driving engine, a sustaining force. If properly directed and guided, hatred can make one invincible. And Sven Hardenberg desperately needed this armor of invulnerability.

He wasn't afraid of pain either, because only then could he be sure that he could feel—like normal people. He remembered a piece of wisdom he had only truly understood behind bars, during the difficult time of his solitary confinement: When you no longer have power over your life and are deprived of your personal freedom, you lose the fear of death!

That first night after the memorable and grueling trial, Hardenberg lay on the small bed in his state-subsidized cage, lost in thought: his parents, his friends, the future, life, the lack of prospects, and the agonizing emptiness of a seemingly meaningless existence. Even he couldn't close his eyes to the memories, despite his desperate attempts countless times. He had skipped dinner, despite the exhausting day and the hasty return flight. The trusty in charge had retrieved the tray, including the plastic cutlery, through the bulletproof lock. Behind bars, he had learned

to suppress the two primary instincts of all living beings: hunger and lust. Only the strongest men knew the meaning of patience: the control of one's inclinations. During the loneliness of Isolation, Hardenberg had also learned to build his own, materially free world. He crafted his own reality from vivid daydreams. Only they could ensure his spiritual survival within these unreal walls. Yet neither his inner flight nor the annoying whirl of the bright ceiling light could drown out the nightly screams of the inmates, whose expressions of despair echoed violently through the courtyard. The strange voices of people from exotic lands did not provoke Hardenberg's usual aggression today. The plastic furniture of the security cell, intended to minimize the risk of injury for everyone, underscored the generally gloomy mood.

Once again, Hardenberg heard the now familiar rattle of keys outside his cell. The small hatch in the in the upper middle of the heavy security door opened.

"Mr. Hardenberg, should I turn off the light now?"

"Yes, you may." The light went out instantly. In the security area, this could only be done from outside. The *dangerous* inmate wasn't even allowed to decide this for himself.

"Do you need anything else?"

"No, thank you. Unless you can finally get these insane Kanaks to shut up," Hardenberg said ironically, smiling weakly into the darkness.

"Unfortunately, hardly, we don't have that many padded cells available here," joked the good-natured prison guard.

"Good night, Mr. Hardenberg!"

"Good night!"

The blue-checked prison blanket felt rough. It had become cold in the cell, as the heating was turned off in the evenings. That night, his friends and his teachers had to get along without him, too, for Hardenberg was in no mood to read—his beloved books remained untouched. He was neither sullen nor bitter, but immensely disappointed and disillusioned. Sometime late in the

early hours of the morning, he finally fell asleep, his thoughts tired and emaciated—the complete understanding he aspired to, had reached the limits of the unconscious and was forced to resign for the time being.

Hardenberg woke up in good spirits late in the morning and ate a hearty breakfast. His willpower was his most effective weapon, the sublime legacy of his Junker blood. Some people grew from adversity, which broke most others. They radiated in the exasperation of their martyrdom. The proud, mysterious white stag of his Germanic ancestors roared invincibly from within him.

The mail arrived, and after so many months of seclusion, Hardenberg, as a fully-fledged prisoner, finally received his. The corrections officer arrived with the usual sack: it was bulging with letters that, by order of the public prosecutor, were not to be handed over during pretrial detention. He examined the sack in disbelief—over 150 letters, and they were all for him. His lawyers had managed to get the withheld mail released. It was like Christmas, Easter, and birthday all rolled into one—the cheerful words, the encouragement, the declarations of affection from past and perhaps future romances, and the many expressions of solidarity from a healing community of *Volksgemeinschaft* from all over the world. His heart burned brightly. It took him hours to get an initial overview, and he already began mentally composing replies.

One letter, however, stood out a little. The three-month-old stamp was difficult to decipher—possibly Spain. The envelope also showed no sender. It contained only a photograph of an infant. On the back was the handwritten note: *Amicus certus in re incerta cernitur*. And then the presumably translation: "In times of need you will recognize a true friend." The identifying mark in the lower right corner was "T.S."—with no further clues. Hardenberg couldn't make sense of it. In the later years of his political imprisonment, the secret was not revealed, but always at the end

of July or the beginning of August, Hardenberg received a print of the same blond-haired, blue-eyed youth, who was growing taller and more handsome.

The responsible admissions committee didn't take long to assign Hardenberg. There weren't many correctional facilities in Germany that wanted him. They sensed trouble. Only a maximum-security prison was considered. Hardenberg actually wanted to be transferred to Berlin to be close to the still-existing BFP headquarters, but his family in Hamburg also needed him. He therefore chose to stay closer to home, especially to be close to his beloved mother and his frail grandmother, both of whom had suffered greatly in recent months.

Saying goodbye to Stammheim just days later wasn't difficult; his possessions were limited, and he looked forward to his parents' visits every two weeks. The journey on the prison transport was exhausting. The bus in which Hardenberg *celebrated* his first birthday while incarcerated was cramped, and the small cabins, each with four inmates, were extremely uncomfortable. Since many small facilities were visited to load and unload inmates, the transport took three days. The overnight stays in the sparse transport cells were even more strenuous than usual, but the bus had a small, barred window, and after the long period of involuntary abstinence, Hardenberg was once again able to visually experience his beloved nature. He couldn't get enough of the green forests, the neat houses, the remote farms, and the light, calming mist of early November—the month of his birth, his disposition, and his inner, indomitable Scorpio.

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Hardenberg had found the Stuttgart-Stammheim correctional facility modern, sterile, and lacking in charisma. The penal institution in Hamburg seemed different to him: old, dirty, and with a palpable aura of loss and evil. Hardenberg was led to a

temporary cell. He was assigned a solitary confinement. They weren't going to examine him until the next day at a conference. The guard had the bare necessities brought to the new arrivals. It was late afternoon—the door opened before food distribution.

"Mr. Hardenberg, if you want, you can shower now. Towels are provided, but you'll need to bring your own soap or shower gel."

Hardenberg undressed down to his underwear, longing for the hot cleanliness. He took his toiletry bag and stepped into the corridor. He noticed that the other arrivals were also getting ready and thought he knew he was the only German among them.

"Please follow me."

The prison officer opened a large shower with twelve unprotected places; in the middle of the room was a bathtub, but apparently without a water connection.

"You have ten minutes, then you go back to your cells for dinner."

Hardenberg chose the farthest corner, undressed completely, and began soaping his underwear. He would later place them on the old radiator. Since the clothes boxes he had brought with him hadn't been handed out yet, one had to improvise.

Once again, as so often, he stood alone among others, even against others if necessary. The secret of this strength had already revealed itself to him as a young man. He felt the eyes of others on his body, but he didn't feel uncomfortable. He was all too familiar with those envious glances at his athleticism and masculinity. His 1.95 m (6'5") height was flawless, apart from the battle scars. The smaller, dark-skinned subjects couldn't help but stare at the silent, menacing giant. His completely tattooed upper body nipped any hesitation in the bud: Sven Hardenberg was German—and he was a nationalist!

A stocky but very muscular prisoner approached him and admired his chest with the large Prussian imperial eagle and the words: "Everything for Germany".

"Hey, potato, are you a *Nazi* or what?" asked the gawking stranger provocatively.

Hardenberg didn't think twice; he immediately noticed that his opponent was accustomed to violence and unafraid—after all, he considered himself strong within the group. He looked through the rabble-rouser and paid only passing attention to his size and physical agility, for otherwise the fight would already be lost. Only the weaknesses, doubts, and fears within an opponent were of any importance to him. His own "weakness," namely, his deep-seated abhorrence of violence, had to be put aside once again. The instinct for survival prevailed.

Without hesitation, Hardenberg kicked the provocateur in the abdomen with lightning speed and force. His opponent groaned in pain, tried in vain to dodge, and lost his balance. Those who retreat in close combat have usually already lost—Hardenberg had taught this to his students in various countries. His rival's right side was now unprotected, and Hardenberg landed a blow on his cheekbone, hurling his opponent against the wall. Hardenberg was already behind him, digging his forearm powerfully into his neck. The sound of his nose breaking on the clean tiles was clearly audible, while the blood ran down the drain. Despite his wild impetuosity, Hardenberg remained mentally composed. His opponent collapsed to the floor, while Hardenberg once again eyed those around him with unbridled rage, letting them know that it was time for the next attack. No one came. Hardenberg grabbed the man lying on the floor by the long, black hair and dragged him to the bathtub. There, he applied a judo move and threw the heavy body in. His heart rate had increased only slightly during the entire altercation. He walked past the other naked men unaffected. Whether they hated him or begged for his

favor was unimportant to him. With the utmost audacity, he continued showering while the others gathered around the exit, even though the time hadn't yet expired. The secured door was unlocked and opened.

"Are you done already, men? ... My God, what happened here?" The officer pressed the emergency button next to the light switch, and several guards immediately appeared to help.

"No one leaves, you all stay here!"

The guards treated the unconscious man. A short time later, a paramedic arrived and arranged for him to be transported to the infirmary. The shift supervisor was already waiting impatiently.

"So! What happened here?" No one spoke. "You there! Don't understand anything? And what about you? What's your name?" Hardenberg stared back, silently displaying his superiority.

"This is Hardenberg. Arrived today from Stammheim," a correctional officer said to the shift supervisor.

"Hardenberg? That name rings a bell. Surely you can contribute to the investigation. You're not like the others here, are you?" Hardenberg remained silent.

An older Turk stepped forward and spoke to the shift manager:

"He is slipping." The Turk deliberately spoke bad German and was pleased that the *master* was getting upset inside.

"Slipped? Yes, of course! And then he fell right into the bathtub, his blood splashing all the way to the back wall..." the head guard exclaimed ironically, but not particularly ambitiously interested in solving the case. He didn't seem to attach much importance to this tragedy.

"Yes, yes, boss, he wants wash his long hair, you know? He sticks head in bathtub, slipping, and fall in..."

The shift supervisor turned away from the Turk, looked at his officers, looked again at Hardenberg and walked away.

"Get everything in order and lock the pack away!" was still heard.

When Hardenberg looked at the old Turk, he nodded. The German responded appreciatively, knowing that even in such a case, prisoners stick together against the guards. If there were problems or differences, they were resolved within their own ranks—a risky matter of honor among prisoners.

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The prison director did not usually attend admissions conferences, but this inmate interested him. The extent to which he was involved in yesterday's incident could not be determined. The injured, who was on the mend—and on his way to another institution—also remained silent, as was to be expected. Hardenberg entered accompanied by two security officers.

"Please take a seat, Mr. Hardenberg. We are gathered here today to determine your correctional and rehabilitation plan. I admit that you are not a typical case, but despite your father's reputation, you will be treated no better than anyone else, nor any worse," the prison director assured Hardenberg. He showed no reaction, so the director looked nervously around the room and then introduced the conference members individually.

Hardenberg surveyed the assembled conference and began to assess them. The psychologist in charge was young and pretty, but she examined Hardenberg as if he were a worthwhile study object, so that Hardenberg revealed his complete contempt and scorn for her. Women of this type were repugnant to him. They strove for equality and didn't understand even the simplest rules of the power struggle between the sexes. Hardenberg considered *modern* psychology as superstition, as it refused to accept the purity of the dark side of the human personality. This doctrine refused to acknowledge the fact that the suppression of these instincts was a guarantee for the spread of modern sociopaths. Hardenberg suppressed nothing. He controlled, but was always aware of his own abysses, and the time came when these abysses

became his confidants. They gave him the true innocence of a therapeutic godlessness.

"You won't have it easy here, Mr. Hardenberg. That's why you'll be assigned to the privileged wing with students and other people eager to learn. We have over 80 percent non-Germans here, and your conspicuous behavior will cause unrest. I'm not saying you have to deny your convictions, but some restraint would be appropriate. We don't tolerate violence here—unfortunately, it can't always be prevented. We know of serious injuries and even deaths. That you can defend yourself goes without saying. Your record speaks volumes—but even you can't stand up to everyone."

Hardenberg listened attentively to the director of the institution. He had a firm will to survive, and therefore he was already making plans for every eventuality that might come his way. He wasn't one of those exorbitant men who, because of their supposed supremacy, only saw what they wanted to see. He had the gift of seeing beyond the facade. Here, too, he harbored no illusions. The future situation was delicate, but he would never give in. It was a danger, a challenge that he wanted and had to face and overcome. He had lived dangerously for most of his life and was drawn to thrills like a moth to a flame. His life experience taught him that courage had to be tested and proven again and again, just as the blade of a sword should be sharpened again and again. Inwardly, he was looking forward to this new situation. Yesterday's encounter in the shower had already sharpened his senses and ignited his fighting spirit. Homer, the "first poet of the West," wrote that men grow weary of sleeping, loving, singing, and dancing more quickly than of fighting. Sven Hardenberg could not live a cowardly life; he would rather die than endure this shame. Achilles and Odysseus, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar and Hannibal, Napoleon and Lützow, Field Marshal

Hindenburg and General Ludendorff, Rudel and the Desert Fox Rommel were his soul mates and his brothers in arms in spirit.

"How do you envision your future in this institution? What do you want to do, and how do you intend to contribute to your rehabilitation?"

Now it was time for Hardenberg to take the initiative and clearly clarify the situation. He had familiarized himself with the circumstances in just a few minutes—he had no scruples.

"Well, gentlemen, and of course lady, I would like to thank you for the unusual welcome—I never expected so much interest and attention. ... I imagine my future in this institution as follows: peace, respect, idleness, and, at most, intellectual work."

The conference participants looked somewhat perplexed, but Hardenberg continued speaking in such a natural and relaxed manner as if he were leading the conference.

"I want peace and quiet. That requires a solitary cell, as required by law. You will, of course, say that a private cell is out of the question due to overcrowding. But you will have no choice—if you put me in a cell with another inmate, he will not survive the night." Hardenberg's eyes flashed with conviction. "I expect respect, courtesy, and decency, and I am naturally willing to extend this to those I interact with. This applies to foreigners and Germans alike. I have decided to continue my studies at the state distance-learning university of Hagen, but working in a factory for some kind of slave wage is out of the question for me. This state has unjustly condemned me, and I'll be damned if I continue to serve it. You can threaten me with the usual 23 hours of imprisonment. But if you've read my file, and I assume you have, you'll see that I'm unfazed. You know, I actually prefer isolation, because I want to have as little to do with that common rabble as possible!"

After a brief moment of silence, the prison educator in charge spoke to the prison director:

"In principle, I have nothing against it and will support Hardenberg in his studies, but the prisoners actually have to prove themselves for half a year first. The decision, of course, is yours."

"I think we should give Mr. Hardenberg the benefit of the doubt. Enrollment shouldn't be difficult; teaching and computer rooms are available. We haven't had a promising student in a long time—we could really use a little public recognition," the head of the institute decided.

"How do you plan to finance your studies, teaching materials, and books, Mr. Hardenberg?"

"If you allow it, my parents will pay for it."

"Good, then we've settled this matter. However, I ask for discretion, because such agreements shouldn't be spread among the inmates. Agreed?" Everyone nodded—including Hardenberg. The psychologist immediately spoke up, fearing being ignored or ignored:

"But we can't make any compromises when it comes to resocialization. I would like to see Mr. Hardenberg twice a week initially to discuss a therapeutic approach. I think there's a great deal to discuss. The file is extensive and, I must admit, impressive. I believe I am capable of helping you achieve your desired implementation objective, Mr. Hardenberg."

For the first time in a long time, Hardenberg burst out laughing. The other participants also grinned in unison. The inexperienced and still dedicated psychologist in government service truly had a lot to learn. He was adept at verbally destroying such people. He had used this skill countless times before..

"My dear Miss ..."

"My name is ..."

"I'm not interested in that, my dear, because we're unlikely to get to know each other better. I admire your willingness to self-sacrifice, but how do you want to help me?"

"It's about ..."

"Please don't answer, that was a purely rhetorical question. You seem to need help. A bit of civil service as a career springboard, and you think you can improve the world! Who do you think you're dealing with here? A disturbed, complex-ridden, criminal, perverted, antisocial, and ruthless patient? Hardly, dear Miss ...!"

"But you're a ..."

"I am a revolutionary, and like almost all good and truly *dangerous* revolutionaries, I know and understand the ways of the establishment. Do you believe that Marx, Engels, Jünger, or Hess came from the oppressed proletariat? But no! They weren't part of the working class, but they knew how to indoctrinate and control the fickle rabble. ... and therefore, if it pleases me, I will seek you out and help you expand your cognizance. I will probably help you make that leap from government service of which you are deeply ashamed. Your face reflects the longing for a faith, but I am not and cannot be your redeemer. You are a shadow of what you could have been if you had dedicated yourself to a cause, as I did."

"But I just wanted to ..." she tried to object..

"If you want to do something, then fight against the plebeian beer materialism and Konrad Lorenz' human self-domestication of our society—this depraved state of mind of the Zeitgeist. I, to paraphrase Nietzsche, am a flash of lightning from the dark cloud of mankind. You certainly won't find my template in your clever books!"

The young psychologist blushed and was completely speechless and dismayed:

"I don't know what to say... I have to excuse myself ..." She fled the room.

"You really know how to make friends," the prison director tried to lighten the mood.

"Well, as you may have noticed, I'm not looking for friends. Since I'm not hoping for an early release, I don't need to be formal. Even if they want me released early, there will be no con-

cessions on my part. I'm prepared to serve my entire sentence, until the very last day," Hardenberg said, reprimanding himself for having overstepped the mark with the psychologist. He wanted to show the young idealist her limits, but not hurt her feelings. But it was this vulnerability she displayed that had unexpectedly attracted him. This worried him a little, and he was aware that this matter wasn't yet closed for him.

The director summed up:

"So we all know where you stand, Mr. Hardenberg. Actually, a refreshing change. You will now be escorted to your wing. Should any difficulties arise, please contact the senior wing officer. Thanks for now!"

"I would also like to thank you," replied Hardenberg with his usual courtesy.

After Hardenberg had left the room and suddenly there seemed to be more space available, the remaining participants of the conference talked and agreed that the new inmate, who had fascinated them so much, had to be watched very closely.

"Why did you allow him to behave like that?"

The prison director looked at the questioning prison educator in surprise:

"The colleague may be young and inexperienced, but she has to stand her ground, otherwise she has no chance. If the inmates sense that she can't defend herself, they'll do whatever they want with her."

"I understand that, but we can't simply exempt Hardenberg from the obligation to see the psychologist," replied the head educator.

"By law, there is no obligation to participate in therapy. But if Dr. Bach listened carefully, and I'd be generous enough to assume she did, she will have realized that Hardenberg, in just a few sentences, revealed his world of thought and his intellectual direction to all of us, whether intentional or not—that's something we can work with."

The wing did indeed seem cleaner, more orderly, and quieter than the others. Even the walls were clean. The *fashionable* immortalizations in the form of graffiti by more or less artistically gifted inmates were absent here. On the way to the wing, Hardenberg noticed the numerous dark-faced figures loitering in and outside the cells. A tall black man with dreadlocks shook hands with a German man with an unkempt ponytail, but friendship wasn't the motive; rather, it was the transfer of drugs. The officer the new arrival was following must have seen it too, but he didn't intervene. Hardenberg quickly realized who was in charge here.

In front of the wing office on the second floor stood a short, stocky, but friendly-looking official. He was the head of the wing and liked to personally greet new arrivals—especially this one.

"Mr. Hardenberg, this is Mr. Kleinhans, the wing chief. He will take over from here and brief you," said the security officer, who then left again. Kleinhans approached Hardenberg and, surprisingly, shook his hand.

"I think we'll get along, Mr. Hardenberg. There are rules here, like everywhere else, and if you follow them, I'll try to stay out of your business as much as possible. Agreed?"

"Very well, Mr. Kleinhans," said Hardenberg, returning the kindness.

"So, Mr. Hardenberg, here is your cell. Please check this list to make sure everything is present and ready for use. Then please sign."

"Better than I thought," Hardenberg surveyed the cell.

"It was renovated two days ago."

"My things are still in the transport department?"

"No, they are probably already in the clothing and property room. We'll go down to the basement later and get your things, before the men come back from the workshops. If I'm there, the officers will be a bit more generous and keep only a little. We

Germans have to stick together," said prison guard Kleinhans, giving Hardenberg a knowing wink.

Hardenberg thoroughly inspected the long, narrow cell: the eight square meters that would likely be his home for the next four years, even though he didn't think he'd ever get used to it. The large steel door opened outwards and leaned against the wall. There was no way to close or barricade the door from the inside; only a rope or rubber band could be used to hook the handle from the outside and temporarily close it. On the inside next to the entrance were the light switch and the intercom, which could be used to call an officer in an emergency, who would then first ask what the matter was. The *keymasters*, how the guards were sometimes disparagingly referred to by the prisoners, didn't like it when the call button was pressed too often, and they certainly didn't want to visit the cell for nothing. To the right of the entrance was the toilet bowl, with a dingy curtain as a privacy screen, which was usually unnecessary given the single occupancy. Next to it hung the sink, naturally only with a cold water connection. Above it was a shatterproof mirror, which thus couldn't be used as a weapon. And finally, in the back right corner, the green all-purpose table: desk, dining table, kitchen counter—all in one. Above this, against the high, cold, white-washed reinforced concrete wall, was a shelf for books—for the few inmates who seriously read, let alone owned them. Hardenberg was lucky, as his cell included two new chairs, but they were just as hard and uncomfortable as the old ones. On the opposite side, at the level of the toilet bowl, was a two-part locker, in front of which was the small bed frame: 1.90 m by 0.80 m—his feet would once again be exposed towards the outside wall. There was also a window in the room with the high ceiling—barred, of course, and so high that even Hardenberg, with his guardsman's height, could only look out by standing on a chair. He would cover the window, as most inmates did who had

booked longer stays. The agony of freedom was sometimes worse than the darkened reality.

Hardenberg set about hanging up the towels. There was also bed linen on the mattress, showing unsavory signs of wear. The blue sheet smelled of chlorine, but it was clean. The patched, blue-and-white checked covers for the duvet and the uncomfortable synthetic headboard were quickly put on. Hardenberg knew that these conditions were only temporary. Later, he would have his mother send him private bed linen—and, above all, a real feather pillow. He had only worn prison clothes during his solitary torture confinement in Stammheim, but since he had enough private clothing, that changed abruptly after his conviction. Not every inmate was so well off. Many had only what the state provided. Most of them had known nothing else.

As promised, Kleinhans led Hardenberg into the clothing chamber. The *Kleiderkammer* officers in the basement were a special caste: mostly seasoned and thick-skinned correctional officers who ended their professional careers there. They had seen it all; it was hard to upset them. They saw the prisoners only rarely—and then only separated by a counter. When the new arrivals entered, they were usually too intimidated to resist. Experience shows that when men stand naked in front of you, they lose their overconfidence. When the old ones are released, they are too elated to be frustrated. And if an inmate was granted leave, they certainly wouldn't risk having their excursion to freedom canceled by some rash action in the property depot. This was another reason why the basement crew could usually afford a jovial tone.

"Mr. Hardenberg, we've been waiting for you. We're finally getting a decent German into our rotten walls," said the self-appointed *Capo* with a broad grin.

"Come on, Volker, I have to go back upstairs. The joyful working class is coming home soon, expecting to be served a hearty dinner," joked Kleinhans.

"Yes, indeed! As you command, Wing Commandant! Mr. Hardenberg, please stand there in front of the wall—on the painted footprints."

Hardenberg followed the instructions while the officer pressed a button on the machine. A passport photo was taken and simultaneously inserted into an ID card.

"There, please. You must always carry this identification card with you when you leave your cell. I managed to get a nice photo. Let's unpack."

The chamber chief and his colleague began to spread out the contents of the prepared boxes from Stammheim.

"So, first, let's talk about clothes. You can pack socks, underwear, shirts, and sweatpants; you have enough of them, so you're allowed to wear your own clothes with us. You can also wear your watch and ring, but be careful, people are stealing like gypsies here." He gave Hardenberg a large box, which he began to fill.

"Two portable immersion heaters? Well, pack up quickly before I change my mind. You have a lot of books; normally I'm only allowed to give you three."

"I will continue my studies and need all the books. I trust in your understanding."

"An educated right-winger, too? I'll put up with that—sure. Let's take a look at what's accumulated there, and what your parents sent. Writing materials, pens, calculator, two coffee mugs with the family crest—nice, nice—personal cutlery including a blunt butter knife with plastic handles, various snacks, two large NESCAFÉ *bombs*, a tablecloth ..."

"My God, what is this?" the chief heard his younger colleague, who had just been meticulously recording the items handed out, exclaim. A third official had just lifted the large box containing countless letters onto the counter.

"Do you want to take them all with you? We can store them down here or shred them and burn them," the old guard offered.

"Burn them? No, no, I'll take them all with me. I still have to answer most of them. I don't want to break the lonely hearts of those lovely German girls—I'm sure you'll understand that, gentlemen," joked Hardenberg, fitting in with the good mood. The box was handed to him in one piece. What the officials didn't know was that Hardenberg had hidden a considerable amount of cash in various envelopes. The money, which was smuggled in by his lawyer—at his father's behest—was a necessary security behind bars. One could not only buy comforts, but also power—and Sven Hardenberg always strove for power, regardless of his circumstances.

"Now to the stereo radio. It's sealed, but we ordinarily have to seal it again. But what's normal here? Pack it up. CDs, not bad, pack them up, but we have to listen to one for inspection, so there aren't any lyrics left on them that could jeopardize the purpose of the sentence—whatever that may be," joked the chamber chief.

"*Survival* is the goal, everyone knows that ..." his colleague joked.

The CD was playing. A well-known folk bard plucked his guitar and sang with inspiration about the unrewarding joys and pains of "feeling German"—everyone in the room nodded their heads slightly, as if they wanted to agree with the message of the lyrics.

"You're the right person for me, Hardenberg. Pack it up! Oh, come on, pack everything up! It'll be fine—it's almost Christmas, after all. Unfortunately, your television will have to stay here—I can't take responsibility for that alone. The responsible wing solicitor will decide whether you'll get it, since only long-term prisoners after three years are allowed one. But write an application! Since you're a student, you must be up to date on current events,

right?! Kleinhans will manage it—you can count on us old comrades."

"Thanks for the good advice!" Hardenberg replied, giving him his winning smile. Kleinhans grabbed the box bulging with letters and headed for the door. Hardenberg lifted the large box and wanted to follow.

"One last comment, Mr. Hardenberg!" The chamber chief became serious and emphatic: "We have a lot of riffraff here who first need to be socialized behind bars, and you won't like them. Everyday life here is quite hard and dangerous. The Turks and Lebanese have the power, and the Black Africans are no joke either. Even the prison gays stick together. The others are divided, and most Germans can't be relied upon; they're either cowards, weak, or ass-kissers. You'll find few civilized people here, and most of them are prison-civilized. You, Mr. Hardenberg, are strong, self-confident, intelligent, and stubborn. They will try to break you. Don't let them intimidate you, and hold on to your humanity with both hands!"

"You can count on it. Once again, my sincere thanks," Hardenberg said resolutely and left.

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Everyday life in a maximum security prison was truly hard, but you either got used to it or you perished. Things had become serious—a bloody, holy seriousness.

Hardenberg tried to stay inconspicuous during the first few days and weeks: a method he had already learned in *soldiery*. Of course, it was impossible to miss this tall, ominous, and now bald colossus, who, striding with his head held high, immediately dominated every space wherever he appeared—even if he was often unaware of it. Likewise, his tattoos and T-shirt slogans testified to his attitude and his beliefs.

He participated in the yard exercises and did his own laps in the cool air of the approaching winter. The piercing gazes of foreign-looking strangers bounced off him without a trace. There was the opportunity to do sports. Hardenberg lifted weights, ran laps alone around the soccer field, and used the evening hours in his small cell to repeatedly practice his familiar martial arts techniques until fatigue overcame him and allowed him to fall asleep peacefully.

There were attempts by some inmates to get in touch with Hardenberg, but he initially politely rejected them. His priority was to build a base, begin his studies, and explore the goings-on of prison life. The time would come to gather a small group around him and direct it, but he didn't want to rush anything. The documents from the university arrived quickly. The books were on their way. The cell was now surprisingly comfortably furnished, a fact he owed to Kleinhans and his old comrades in the cell. New curtains were found, packages from his parents were irregularly handed to him, and the television for the cell was approved by the wing jurist, a decorated veteran of a traditional fraternity. Hardenberg was the only one allowed to move freely around the wing during the day. Only the trusties on the three floors, who ensured cleanliness and order on behalf of the wing chief, received this favor. Naturally, this triggered a certain amount of envy early on, and there was some whispering, but Hardenberg ignored the rumors. No one dared to approach him personally.

The flood of mail never stopped. He had ordered a typewriter so he could work in his cell at night, but it hadn't arrived yet. Hardenberg therefore spent every free minute of the morning answering the many letters in the computer room, to which he had been given a key as a student. During these hours, he felt at peace. He could forget the reality that awaited him outside the door of this room and concentrate fully on being with the people who were so far away from him. The one-sided conversations

with family, friends, comrades, and like-minded people gave him the strength to endure the overwhelming impressions that inevitably presented themselves to him in the cell blocks.

Hardenberg knew the atrocities people were capable of. Whether on the South African border fighting terrorists or during the Croats' liberation struggle against their Yugoslav oppressors, the excesses of war that Hardenberg had to witness were anything but beautiful and honorable, even if the goal remained pure. Behind bars, however, abysses opened up. This was where the perverted dregs of human existence sometimes gathered. Kleinhans and Hardenberg spent many an afternoon drinking coffee and discussing the curious and terrifying backstories of some of the inmates. As an amateur psychologist and researcher of humanistic destructiveness, Sven Hardenberg was interested in the pasts of the many miserable subjects around him, with whom he was forced to breathe the same air. A stifling atmosphere of envy, hatred, resentment, and lies of self-deception. To the outsider, he knew, all prisoners were equal. The brain-impotent *German Michel* believed that whoever was in prison had earned it—a simple, one-dimensional, kitchen-table philosophy that the average citizen claimed for himself. This naive carelessness of the simpletons was both despised and admired by complex people like Sven Hardenberg, always with the longing to be able to cast off the burden of an all-knowing consciousness—albeit a fleeting longing that lasted only a few moments.

"You know, Mr. Hardenberg, sometimes I think nothing could frighten me anymore, but then an event occurs, and I realize I can still feel shock. I can only hope that you never lose this ability, because if you become a complete cynic, you'll harm yourself. I, too, hope that I will survive this period of reflection and testing mentally unscathed, but honestly, I doubt it. You don't belong here. You're not the first person I've said that about, but you're the clearest case I've had so far."

"Please tell us about the other cases!"

"I'm not actually allowed to do that, but it's just between us ..."

Kleinhans stood up to look out into the empty hallway. There was a commotion on the other side as a trusty, called a "cleaner," was scrubbing the shower room. The wing chief fetched the coffee pot and poured more. Then he opened a desk drawer, took out a flask, and added a little of the contents to the two cups.

"About two years ago, a young Italian in his mid-twenties was with us. He had been driving drunk, and then twice more without a license. Instead of being sent to an open prison—his sentence was light—he came straight to us. He was small and weak, but nice and polite. Everyone liked him. The others sought contact with him, and he was exploited and ripped off to the point of insanity. But he didn't complain. Then he got into the wrong circles. He was offered heroin, and he took it. It wasn't long before he was addicted. He gave everything for the drug. His monthly commissary goods had already been pawned. The cell inventory was gone, and in the end, he only had one commodity left: himself. His dealer, a Nigerian whose German wife smuggled the drugs between her legs as a tampon during long-term visits, sent him from client to client. But then things got even worse. First he got hepatitis, then HIV. Five and a half months after his imprisonment, I found him in the shower room. He had slit his wrists and was slowly dying alone on the cold floor. He would have been released three weeks later, but now it was brought forward," said Kleinhans, pausing to take a sip directly from his flask. "... I wanted to go to the funeral, but I didn't get permission from the prison administration. The lawyer of the boy's mother had requested an inquest. Since the father was dead, she had only had her son. The inquest was, of course, discontinued. A week after the funeral, his mother drove at top speed into a large linden tree by the side of the road—she had no chance, just as little as her son."

"You've experienced a lot and had to endure so much, Mr. Kleinhans. Perhaps I'll write a book about you someday and name it after Goethe: 'The Sorrows of the Young Warden.' What do you think?" Hardenberg asked cheerfully, without wanting to downplay the seriousness of the conversation.

"Well, thank you very much, but you can save yourself the trouble," Kleinhans replied ironically.

Kleinhans had much to say about certain pitiable specimens, and Hardenberg was sometimes tormented by hearing the horrific details, but he could not and would not suppress his scientific curiosity.

For example, there's the story of the young police sergeant who, more or less absentmindedly, pocketed a wad of cash during a raid. It contained two packets of crack cocaine, which he didn't know. When he was discovered, he was in trouble. Prison was hell for him, because it naturally came out that he had been a *pig*. There were plenty of inmates who worked in the administrative wing or the medical wing. They overheard a lot of things or pored over files. They sold the information without considering the consequences. The former police officer was transferred many times, but the *prison drums* were faster. The next thugs were already eagerly waiting for him.

There were also hideous, horrific, and imbecilic monsters: for example, the doctor's son who had dismembered both parents and had been fighting for years to preserve his locked-up inheritance of millions. He was now "editor-in-chief" of the prison newspaper, which was well known even beyond the prison walls and barbed wire.

Or the "love killer," who ambushed lovers in nature and then slaughtered them with his machete at the height of their sexual intercourse. He wallpapered his small cell with thousands of red

hearts and, under a pseudonym, maintained lively pen pal relationships with boys and girls throughout Germany.

The most revolting inmates, however, were the numerous child molesters who lived isolated and secured on a *special* floor and indulged their dreams of young, innocent flesh. They had their own kitchen where they baked cakes for prisoners and their own TV and exercise rooms, as common rooms would have been too dangerous for them. These predators of innocent souls were considered "patients" in need of help, not criminals. They were the lowest rung of the hierarchy behind bars and were hated: by the guards, the prisoners, and the relatives of their victims. Only the psychologists liked these pedophiles, as they were a worthwhile and willing subject for their desired dissertations. This is the only explanation for why the children's pages of the OTTO or QUELLE catalogs were recognized as the highest currency. The average convict paid with a "suitcase," a tobacco pouch, or with a "bomb," preferably NESCAFÉ Gold; only the sick rapists of innocent youth exchanged a lovingly home-baked cheesecake for the eagerly awaited glossy pictures of little, young bathing beauties.

There was also a 65-year-old mass murderer from Alsace who ultimately found *his* Jesus. He had killed several women in northern Germany in the late 1960s. He attacked them in their train compartments, killed them, raped them, cut off their labia, and threw the desecrated corpses from the moving train. When the monster was finally caught, he carried parts of these dried lips as hunting trophies in his wallet. While in prison, he joined the church and became a henchman of the prison chaplain, who in turn hosted a weekly coffee party to entertain the beast's many older female *friends*—state-approved, volunteer prison counselors. During services, the long-bearded, two-meter-tall giant regularly threw himself on his stomach in front of the large cross and screamed "Hallelujah" until he lost consciousness. Afterwards, he politely dismissed *his* ladies with a sense of social

conscience and watched them depart. Only someone who had now seen the monster's old eyes could recognize the flicker of still-present murderous greed, which left an inexplicable, cold shudder in the observer.

Despite the adverse circumstances that occasionally threatened to darken the heart, there were also beautiful times of idleness and reckless and passionate daydreaming. On each new day, at the hour of the goddess Aurora, the dawn dispelled the spiritual blackness of the previous night. Hardenberg fought against these forces of darkness and was always ready and constantly on guard. The wing was quiet during the day, as most of the prisoners were at work.

The institution was almost self-sufficient and produced most things itself. Whether it was a butcher's shop, bakery, wood, metal, or automotive workshops, bookbinding, weaving, or industrial laundry, it had almost everything. Even the famous "bag-gluing" still existed. Hardenberg loved the arts and took refuge in music and books. He was fascinated by German composers such as Beethoven, Mozart, the incomparable and mystical Wagner, but also the always cheerful and romantic Strauss.

He also loved literature. Before his incarceration, he read mostly specialist literature, history, and adventure novels. Behind bars, he definitively became a passionate reader and bookworm. In the nearly five years he spent in prison, he will have read over 400 books, from popular fiction to the works of great German poets and philosophers. He forgot some of the thick tomes immediately after putting them down for the last time. Other works, however, with their hidden harmony of things, burned miraculous patterns into Hardenberg's soul, opening his creative spirit, revealing new worlds, and allowing him to reach intellectual heights he had never even suspected. While browsing, he experienced the unrivaled delight of seeing his most secret judgments confirmed as

valid. He was only able to formulate many feelings and thoughts that he had harbored for years when great writers revealed the right words in their treatises. During lively discussions, he was occasionally unable to determine whether the words were his own or those of a *pen hero* or literary role model, but the instinctive world of thought was very much his own.

Although he had previously published articles in *GERMANIA INCOGNITA*, it was only at this time that he decided to become a writer. Hardenberg knew that only his calling as an author would allow him to influence current events. This development of the bibliophile enabled a miraculous expansion of his inner world: a dissolution of all boundaries and the freedom and purity that a man could only find and attain in personal solitude—alone with his true heart, in the seclusion of his deepest, most mysterious, and opaquest thoughts. And only the writer who had crossed this valley can claim to have discovered the true meaning of life—namely, transience.

For Hardenberg, authors were vanquishers, both the good and the bad. They fought alone and abandoned with the beliefs of a fanatic, without any prospect of success or recognition. Only the poet could truly change anything. He could incite an entire nation with his scribbling. Others needed money, power, and prestige to achieve success, but the storyteller only needed a worthwhile idea to ignite the fire of the world.

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At the end of the year, weeks after his transfer to the Hamburg prison, there was a knock on the open cell door. Kleinhans looked into the cell and found Hardenberg writing.

"Mr. Hardenberg? Are you expecting a visitor?"

"No! Not really! My parents had announced they're coming at the beginning of the new year."

"In any case, the prison visitor department called and said they were expecting you."

"I explicitly told all my friends that I didn't want any visitors. They shouldn't see me here, but rather remember me as I was in freedom. Or is it just another lackey of the state's *filth*, I mean, of course, security?" Officials from various agencies repeatedly attempted to interrogate Hardenberg during his pre-trial detention. He always declined and refused to enter the designated premises.

"I can hardly imagine that, but I can always ask the department. I'm surprised myself that visitors are allowed between Christmas and New Year's—and on a Friday afternoon, no less. Come with me to the office right now, and we'll see."

Kleinhans called and switched on the loudspeaker, while Hardenberg helped himself to the coffee pot and listened patiently. The conversation didn't take long.

"A journalist! I knew you were famous, but now the media is already chasing you."

"There are few kinds of people I detest more than these scumbags in the press. These demagogues and agitators: They lie, deceive, and when they're wrong, they have to be forced to retract their statements, but then they do so in such a way that no one notices. *Aliquid semper haeret*, something always sticks, and usually it's the greasy spit of these scoundrels!" Hardenberg fumed, without the coffee in his full cup even stirring.

"Calm down, Mr. Hardenberg, I'll call and say that you refuse to accept the visitor," said Kleinhans, picking up the phone again.

"No, Mr. Kleinhans, let me have the fun. I'm really in the mood right now and I'm looking forward to a sharp verbal confrontation with a state-subsidized truth-twister."

"Okay, then I'll accompany you to the visiting rooms, but don't do anything stupid," joked wing chief Kleinhans, reaching for his key ring.

Hardenberg sat on a hard chair in the small visiting room and looked through the glass at the beverage dispensers. Next to them were vending machines with cigarettes, candy, and fruit: treats that visitors could purchase to consume during their visit or to give to the inmate to take back to their cell. He waited for his visitor, imagining a slippery, pot-bellied, greedy scribbler hoping to glean some juicy information from a broken and talkative right-wing extremist. Drumming his fingers loudly on the table in impatience, he could hardly wait to hurl his contemptuous opinion in this sleazy character's face.

A jailer approached the visiting room. What followed him was neither greasy nor pot-bellied. It was tall, with light eyes and light hair. It had tender, almost translucent white skin, a gift from its Icelandic mother. And it carried itself confidently, proudly, and righteously, the dowry of its German father. Above all, it was not a he, but a she. When she entered the room and approached Hardenberg in a friendly manner, her hand outstretched, he thought he sensed an unsentimental hardness similar to his own. Hardenberg's fingers immediately ceased their restless movements and rested, outwardly calm, yet with a hint of tension, on the smooth surface of the table.

The journalist had certainly not taken the decision to visit Hardenberg in prison lightly. However, the burden, which had steadily grown since the trial, was now so enormous that it threatened to crush her soul. And even though she found it difficult to admit it to herself, another, not insignificant reason for her visit was her inexplicable longing to see this man again, who, since their first and last brief meeting in court, had incessantly and inexorably crept into her thoughts and thus into her life. She tried to remain as relaxed and calm as possible, even though things looked quite different inside. When she thought of his penetrating gaze, she was no longer sure she was doing the right thing.

"Mr. Hardenberg, my name is Dagmar von Hagen. Please forgive me for coming unannounced, but I would be sincerely pleased if you could receive me." Amazingly, she uttered these words without the slightest hesitation. Her voice, too, sounded remarkably confident and firm.

Hardenberg thought for a moment, rose, and offered her his hand. He looked deep into her eyes, as she had feared, and began to explore her inner life with extraordinary thoroughness. He was perplexed when she neither resisted his gaze nor the scrutiny, but he didn't notice that it took a considerable amount of effort for her to withstand his scrutiny.

"Please, take a seat!" Hardenberg said, appearing on the opposite chair. Now that Dagmar von Hagen had passed this first test, she became considerably calmer, her inner trembling noticeably subsiding. She unexpectedly sat down on the chair directly next to the ideological prisoner.

The officer left the room. Since Hardenberg had been legally convicted, he was entitled to unsupervised visits. Naturally, both parties were patted down before and after the visit.

Hardenberg felt uneasy, but at the same time attracted to her. He enjoyed the clean scent of femininity, mixed with a hint of fine perfume that seemed somehow familiar. He suspected that the experienced press representative was trying to tempt him, but that, like the need to be desired, was part of a woman's nature. Nevertheless, he felt a desire for companionship with a human being, with a female human being. This fact, however, should hardly be surprising after more than a year of abstinence. His protective shields were therefore on full alert.

"I was told you are a journalist."

"Yes, but I am here today as a private citizen and I ask you to believe me."

"... said the cat to the mouse and invited it into its dwelling ..."

"I can understand your reluctance, or rather, your mistrust, but I must still ask for a little confidence ..." Dagmar von Hagen laughed refreshingly and relaxed..

"Well, Miss *Journalist*, then I'm curious to hear what you have to say ..."

Dagmar von Hagen spoke quietly and moved her chair closer to her interlocutor to make possible eavesdropping more difficult. Two years ago, while researching an article about judicial reform in the new federal states, she had learned about the widespread "wiretapping" behind bars. Hardenberg suddenly found her proximity anything but unpleasant.

"I couldn't see you during your pretrial detention, nor was I allowed to write because the public prosecutor's office intercepted your mail, but now I simply had to come to ease my conscience, because I cannot and will not continue living like this!" She took a deep breath and placed her hand lightly on Hardenberg's forearm. He noticed how difficult the following confession was for her.

"As you know, I was at the trial. I had to make a statement that wasn't true. Why I had to make it remains unclear to this day, but I suspect it was not without weight."

Hardenberg remembered her statement very well, and he remembered her. Of course, how could he ever have forgotten her penetrating contemplation and her words? Suddenly, the feelings that had overwhelmed him in the courtroom because of her presence were back. The journalist continued:

"I was present at the preliminary meeting and was allowed to ride with the convoy. I was sitting alone in front of the house where you were. Hans Rittmeister, the BfV officer, wasn't in my car. I correct myself, he was, but then he went with the officers who escorted Thorsten Schwamm out. Before the hearing, I was instructed to cover for Rittmeister. I was threatened with a ban on practicing my profession in Germany, and I love my job, or at least I thought so."

This last statement came from her lips a little wistfully ... but then she composed herself and continued resolutely:

"When your defense attorney questioned me if I was alone in the vehicle, I stated that Rittmeister had been with me until the end, which of course isn't true. Since I wasn't allowed to listen to the other statements, I only learned about your defense attorney's clever approach afterward. When I read the transcript and realized that the time difference between Schwamm's removal and his admission to the hospital was significant, I realized that my testimony might have been intended to legitimize a crucial inconsistency involving Rittmeister."

Hardenberg remained calm and felt the trembling of her hand, which was still resting on his forearm for support.

"Miss von Hagen, what *inconsistency* have you confirmed? Do you have any idea what happened during the missing time, and why they took the risk of threatening you?"

"I have no idea."

"Do you think it's possible that Schwamm was mistreated during this time to incriminate me? I didn't do anything to him—well, almost nothing, so to speak ..."

"I'm a realist, but torture? Such a thing can't happen in our country, can it?" she added uncertainly. Dagmar von Hagen considered it, and it suddenly struck her. Only this theory would explain why she had to make this statement. Was Rittmeister involved, or had he even orchestrated it all? She felt sick. What had she done? Hardenberg waited patiently for her to continue.

"My God, oh my God, can all this be true? Did officials *work over* Schwamm to incriminate you? Were you completely unjustly sentenced to almost five years in this hell behind bars?" Tears streamed down her cheeks as Dagmar von Hagen writhed slightly.

"You have shown me the missing link, Miss von Hagen, and for that I thank you. You are guilty, and it is only fair that you suffer, as I suffered when I had to spend Christmas in such a place of damnation for the second time a few days ago ..."

These infinitely sad words struck her deep within. Now she painfully realized what she had truly committed with her statement and her spinelessness. Because of her professional career, the journalist had allowed an innocent person to be deprived of his freedom.

"You're right, but that's not enough. I want you to use the information to seek a new trial. I'm prepared to accept all the consequences of my actions," she sobbed.

"You were just an insignificant piece in a chess game. If it weren't for you, they would have put someone else in front. I forgive you and admire your greatness and courage in taking this step. Such a character is rare these days. You were just a small cog in the machine of a sordid political affair. If you hadn't testified, it would have been someone else. The outcome would have been the same. I, too, bear the blame, because I should have seen through Schwamm, and then I should have made him disappear. But despite my cynical attitude, I still have ethical ideals, which have once again been interpreted as a weakness. For this reason, and for other reasons as well, I will endure this imprisonment with vastness of heart, but never with humility!"

"How can I help you, what can I do for you? Give me a chance!"

"What do you have in mind?"

"I would like you to allow me to write about you. I would like to know everything about you, and then perhaps we could write a book together to proclaim the truth to the world!" Now her eyes burned, and Hardenberg warmed himself with the embers of her zeal.

"Miss von Hagen, I write a little myself, but let's take things slowly. Feel free to write to me; I appreciate the distraction. You owe me something, and I may ask for a small favor from time to time."

"You may ask for anything!" she replied bluntly and honestly. "You may even keep calling me *Fräulein*—a bit old-fashioned, but that's exactly what I like about it!"

An officer approached the visitor booth:

"Five more minutes, lady and gentleman."

"Listen, before I go, I have to tell you something about Hans Rittmeister: I've heard numerous rumors that he's burned out, left the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, some say he's been fired, but I keep hearing that he's providing the other side with information and more."

"Who is this *other* side?"

"Your side, the *right-wing* side!"

At the moment she said this, a fleeting thought flashed through her mind—initially subconscious, as if she were truly comprehensible—that this mentioned side could also be hers. For a few seconds, she looked in his direction, but rather absently, looking right through him. She quickly regained control. The journalist with the engaging demeanor reached deep into her cleavage, produced a small wad of banknotes, and, trying to be discreet, slipped them to Hardenberg.

"I heard that money could come in handy in here."

"That's true. Thank you, but be more careful in the future, or you'll end up like me. Don't talk to anyone about what we discussed today. Do you understand?"

"Yes, okay!"

"*Okay?* That means *jawohl*," said Hardenberg, giving her a smile that she happily returned.

"Yes indeed; *jawohl*!"

A brief, pleasant silence connected the two, warmth filling the room. There was a knock on the glass pane, time was irrevocably up. Dagmar von Hagen could hardly believe it. She hastily asked:

"May I visit you again in the new year?"

"We'll see—*Dagmar ...*"

"We definitely will—dear *Sven ...*"

Instinctively and without thinking, she unashamedly kissed the astonished Hardenberg and stroked his cheek, turned around and walked to the exit, where a guard was already waiting.

"Our patience and our peacefulness are often seen as a weakness by foreign races and cultures, but whoever does not hear the quiet Teutonic hum within us will not see the blow coming and will not taste the blood that runs down the corpse of the arrogant, overconfident enemy after our victorious throat clamp!"

The Brotherhood

Hardenberg now had another pen acquaintance, but one with a special status. Barely five months had passed since their first visit, and not a day went by without a letter from her, sometimes just a few lines, mostly entire essays. She told him about every conceivable topic: mundane aspects of her daily life, the newspapers and books she read, the films she saw; she vented about politics, philosophy, art, and culture, and expected him to write her his opinion on topics important to him. For several weeks now, her messages had even ended with the final greeting: "Your loving Dagmar" ...

A bond of affection had developed between them, based on an inexplicable soul mate. Anyone who had never been an inmate of a correctional facility would hardly be able to comprehend how important correspondence with the outside world was, as these connections often represented the last respite from dwindling hope. These relationships often achieve a depth and intimacy that seem unattainable in personal encounters, as appearance, demeanor, facial expressions, and the desperate maintenance of a protective facade inevitably inhibit this openness.

The relationship between Dagmar von Hagen and Sven Hardenberg quickly reached a level of passion and devotion on the highest, most immaculate levels, which only a few are ever permitted to experience. Hardenberg knew her thoughts and feelings, dreams and hopes. She knew his too, or at least most of them, because despite his intoxication, he would never be able to fully open up—nor would he want to. He also knew that the real world was different and held other demands and burdens. Their togetherness would only be proven in freedom—the prospects for that were more than good.

"Mr. Hardenberg, how long have you been with us?" Kleinhans asked knowingly, watching Hardenberg rise from his utility table. The jailer enjoyed visiting this pleasant prisoner in his cell.

"It's almost seven months now. Why, do you want to get rid of me?"

"Not at all, I was just wondering if you wouldn't want to expand your commitment to the German inmates?"

"I'm already doing enough, or what do you mean by that?"

"You've become increasingly involved in the inmates' concerns since you've been here, which is why the Germans, as well as others, are flocking to you. The foreign gangs view everything with suspicion, but don't dare approach you. Nevertheless, one day there will be a feud, and I don't think your ranks are sufficiently united."

"I can't disagree with you there. When things get tough, most people hide in their cells anyway. Unfortunately, I don't know anything different."

"I don't really want to and shouldn't interfere, but you have to consolidate your power. One way you can do that is by getting yourself elected as the prisoners' representative. The election is on the last Friday in May, in two weeks. I've brought you the registration form right away, because I'm the election supervisor," Kleinhans said complacent, handing Hardenberg a DIN A4 sheet of paper.

"I'm supposed to become a prisoner representative? One of those sycophants who pander to the director and allow themselves to be used as a token mouthpiece? What am I supposed to do as an inmate spokesman?"

"Normally, I would agree with you, but this time none of the old guard has registered to run. We assume that someone, and that could be literally, has put a knife to their throats. Only members of the ominous MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD, which also calls itself *MB*, have registered. It's clear what's going on."

"That's right, now I understand your sentiment. That would be a clear weakening of the prison system. I still have certain per-

sonal plans in this institution, but if those '*Alis*' also claim the prisoner representation, then it will be hell for us," he mused, and then immediately declared decisively: "Well, give me the slip, it's time for me to officially get involved—and it's also time for us to reclaim this hole!"

Hardenberg realized that his optional hibernation was over. Even he couldn't fail to recognize the harbingers of fate. Although he had had several conversations with a few decent future comrades, he had primarily pursued his own goals. The election was still almost two weeks away. Now he needed support, and in return, he would be willing to provide assistance.

In the last few weeks, he had witnessed terrible things. Things were less civilized in the other three wings. He usually stayed away from them, except when he wanted to go to the sports room or the computer room—then he had to go through them. He was always prepared for a bitter fight, which the others sensed, however, and so he remained unmolested.

For example, three days ago, he returned from the weight room a little early and passed one of the open-plan cells with eight beds. Turks and Arabs loved such spaces because they enjoyed living in communities. Hardenberg had no objections to this. It was a matter of protection, since Turks, Kurds, Lebanese, and Syrians often fought each other. However, when it came to the Germans, the *MB* stood together fearlessly. A groan of pain came from the cell in question. Since the door was wide open due to the late spring humidity, Hardenberg stopped and shuddered at the sight of a young, emaciated, half-naked German lying on his stomach on the large table in the middle of the room. Beside him was a large bottle of body lotion and behind him was a small, sweating, pot-bellied Arab violently taking him from behind. At least ten like-minded inmates stood around the table, some massaging the

penis in their hands, waiting for her chance to thrust into the boy's bony, pale buttocks.

The head of the MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD, who was supervising the activity, came to the door. Hardenberg asked him what was going on. The tall leader hesitated at first, but then answered when he saw the stubbornness and willingness to use violence in Hardenberg's eyes. He was told that this was a heroin-addicted customer who couldn't pay his debts. He would now have his last chance to settle them. While the two top dogs were talking, the young German addict looked to his left, toward the door, and Hardenberg saw pain and shame in his eyes.

He left without a word, but from then on he felt a considerable amount of disgust and revulsion. Although this was an ostracized outcast, a "drug faggot" whom Hardenberg would have ignored without a qualm, the boy was a fellow countryman. By insulting him, the *MB* members were spitting on all Germans—and Hardenberg found that difficult to bear.

Hardenberg remembered this incident only with repugnance and was barely able to banish this perverse image from his mind. On the afternoon of the conversation with Kleinhans, Hardenberg wasn't going to sports; he was waiting for a prisoner who was completing his secondary school education and was about to leave the classroom. An old hooligan who maintained good relationships and hadn't yet lost the fire of resistance.

"Rudi, come into my cell, I would like to speak with you."

Rudi approached Hardenberg, feeling elevated, as the otherwise taciturn giant had called him in public. They had often had lively conversations. He admired Hardenberg. Germans were usually subdued, but not this German. The foreigners, some even German passport holders, gave him a wide berth. He was the right man for the great task of uniting the German inmates—and he shared

this opinion with many other prisoners. He had never been in the cell of the clandestine boss.

"Sven, what's up? Do you need anything?"

"First, take a seat. Did you serve with the Bundeswehr?"

"Yes, in the Luftwaffe, security company."

"Military training—that's good. I want to discuss something serious with you."

"Did something happen?"

"Actually, something has been happening all along, but now it's time to take action against it."

"I'm all ears. We've discussed this topic several times, but you didn't want to get specific. I'm definitely ready to join you. We've been waiting for someone like you."

"I appreciate that. Here's what I want you to do: I want you to talk to all decent prisoners—first of all, only the Germans. We want to form a fellowship for the purpose of self-protection and solidarity. We will be a counterweight to the MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD. Neither gays nor drug addicts are allowed to be among us, so I want you to weed them out in advance—and for now, it will remain *top secret*."

"Sure, Sven, but I have to confess that I used to smoke weed and do coke."

"What's the situation now?"

"Not for a long time. I've made the jump, and I certainly won't be stupid enough to start again. You see, I discovered my German roots late, but now I know what I was missing. Meeting you finally opened my eyes—and for that, I'm truly grateful."

"I'm glad for you, but I don't want your gratitude. I want your loyalty and your commitment to the fatherland—nothing more, nothing less."

"I can definitely assure you of that ..."

"Listen! Tomorrow evening, during the weekend open cell time, I want to talk to the aspirants from our wing. Let's see what we can find here."

"Then I'll go right away. First of all, I'll talk to Lars Geithe. He's tough and is respected, but it won't be easy, as he'd like to be the leader himself. He'll be a tough nut to crack, Sven, but it might be worth it."

Rudi left the cell with a sense of exhilaration, heading for the courtyard to address the first people. Hardenberg knew he had set the ball rolling; from now on, there was no turning back.

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The next evening, after supper and the daily inmate count, the cells were opened, but the wing remained locked. The other three wings did not have this privilege. It was allowed to make *switchover*, the inmates had to register and were moved to the cell of their choice, overnight if desired. The student wing was allowed to move freely three times a week, as many inmates completing their secondary school diplomas or even university entrance qualifications should take the opportunity to do homework in the community or to discuss knowledge-related matters.

A discussion also took place in the cell of the only university enrolled inmate, but it was not about homework, but rather about a deeper philosophy of commitment.

"Gentlemen, thank you for coming. I've already spoken with one or two of you. The problems and dangers of this institution are well known to all of us. Most of you have approached me several times, asking whether we, as proud Germans, would like to take action. I've been hesitant until now, but now the time has come. Before we discuss the details, I would like to briefly outline my plans: We, gentlemen, will establish a communion of solidarity. It will be called GERMANIC BROTHERHOOD OR *GB*. We will seize power in this institution, which will mean struggle and toughness. Any-one who is already feeling fear or concerns should stand up and leave immediately. No accusations will be made."

None of the eight prisoners moved. They hung on the battle-hardened leader's every word. From the 20-year-old skinhead serving time for several *crimes* of forbidden opinion, to the 35-year-old bank robber known in the media as the "Gentleman Safecracker," to the 50-year-old ex-boxer who, armed with a pump-action shotgun, fended off the overwhelming forces of an organized gang in St. Pauli, Hamburg, and still lost everything.

They were all fed up with always having to take a detour whenever non-Germans marched. They were tired of being oppressed, threatened, and intimidated in their own country, and they were ready to put a stop to the injustice here and now. As prison inmates, they were at the very bottom of the pile, but still not prepared to submit without resistance. The right man had come, and they sensed it intuitively—he would restore the natural order, even if it would be risky.

Hardenberg continued:

"But whoever stays now must be aware that everything we discuss and do will remain secret. Anyone who lets out even the slightest hint will have to deal with me and the others. It won't just be a slap in the face. Should one of us be betrayed and transferred to another prison, all the others must and will punish the defector. Understood?"

Now it was even quieter in the cell. The sounds from outside penetrated, but were barely noticed. Lars Geithe, who was not used to subordination, had a few questions. His young face—that of a war god—seemed serious.

"May I ask something?"

"I'm not finished yet, but of course, questions are allowed." Sven Hardenberg looked at Lars Geithe expectantly.

"I'm in favor of this idea of a *brotherhood* and would fully contribute, but who decides who gets punished, for example, and so on?"

"Lars, I decide. I will lead and bear the greatest risk, and I will decide. I will not tolerate dissent or timidity. I will respect everyone who deserves it, and I will also ask for advice or coordinate certain procedures with others if necessary, but I will not discuss them. The GERMANIC BROTHERHOOD will only be strong if obedience from below is demanded and enforced."

"Yeah, I understand, but I'm also a good fighter, and I've never taken any offense from anyone—neither outside nor in here ..."

Hardenberg knew it was important to clarify the situation as early as possible and unambiguously. This would avoid unnecessary trouble later on. In the situation they were currently in, this approach was even essential. He decided to take the tough approach—actions speak louder than words. Hardenberg leaned forward slightly. He was sitting on a chair. Geithe sat opposite him on the bed. Like lightning, his hand shot out, and his knuckles struck Geithe in the throat. While Hardenberg leaned back and continued drinking the coffee, which, despite the blow, remained in the cup without fail, Geithe fell back onto the bed, gasping for breath, grabbed his neck, and turned blue. The others tried to jump up and tend to Geithe.

"Stop! All of you stay seated!" Hardenberg ordered, making it clear that any opposition would be futile.

"Lars, take your hands off your throat! You'll feel better in ten minutes at the latest." Hardenberg briefly pressed on the sides of his larynx, and the wheezing became noticeably weaker.

"Rudi, please give me a towel. Hold it under water first and wring it out." Rudi obeyed immediately. Hardenberg wiped the sweat from Geithe's forehead and then gently placed the towel on his neck, asking him gently:

"Do you understand me now?"

But without waiting for an answer, which Geithe could not have given him anyway, he said to the others:

"Everyone listen carefully! This technique is effective, but also extremely dangerous. If you don't hit hard enough, your opponent will lunge at you furiously. If you hit too hard, your adver-

sary will inevitably suffocate. Just right, and your opponent will be incapacitated. Shock and fear will do the rest. Even friends standing around will be discouraged at the sight of it."

The veteran boxer from St. Pauli looked at Hardenberg admiringly. He knew that only this toughness would guarantee the brotherhood's unity of votes.

"Rudi, please pour everyone some coffee. We'll wait until Lars gets better. He's one of us, and we'll never disregard each other." Everyone looked at him supportively, and Geithe's eyes softened and became more understanding. The deep, but necessary, hurt seemed to leave his soul.

It took barely fifteen minutes before Geithe was sitting upright again and once again receptive.

"Okay, comrades, we'll move on. We'll conquer this wing first and use it as our headquarters and safe haven. Over time, we'll expand, but not too eagerly: quality over quantity. Neither gays nor drug addicts will be admitted, as Rudi has surely already told you. As my old friend Frank Hühn always said: 'We may be warm and brotherly, but we're not *warm* brothers!'" The men, understanding the fine distinction, now laughed and relaxed. "But seriously: I'm no moralist and no child of sadness. Like every decent German, I fundamentally reject the biblical dictates. I don't care who does what with whom, as long as they leave me alone, but the *breechloaders*, just like the addicts, are vulnerable to blackmail and therefore cannot be trusted. Anyone who lets a pack of Kanaks fuck them in the ass for the next heroin *shoot up* can, of course, never belong to us. Anyone who maintains contact with such subjects, regardless of the excuse, is kicked out of the brotherhood and is then fair game, which the *brothers* on the other side will surely be happy about. A conflict is raging within these walls, and we must win it. We must not always philoso-

phize about the big picture, but must also act on the small. We cannot always fantasize about a free, proud fatherland while we surrender the streets, the cities, and the prisons to the enemy without a fight. We must not overlook the trees just because the forest seems overwhelming to us."

Hardenberg looked around and was satisfied with the start. Now he had to dare more, because time was pressing. Lengthy tests were not possible.

"Lars! Rudi! Please stand up!" Hardenberg commanded. They men did so and looked astonished. "These two will be my deputies. We will form a kind of 'triumvirate.' When one of them gives you an order from me, it will be as if I were issuing it personally. They are to be respected without reservation, and the other members will obey them. Everyone here will receive a number in the next few days. I have one, Rudi has two, and Lars has three. The new members of the other wings will, in turn, be subordinate to you. You can only advance in rank through the departure of a member or through special services to the brotherhood. You will be trained militarily, which will be expressed in your speech and demeanor. The triumvirate will soon work out the details."

Rudi and Lars sat down again, as Hardenberg indicated this with his head. The proudly puffed chests each of them suddenly displayed were unmistakable, but they also realized that from today on, they would be put to the test.

"The election for prisoner representatives is the week after next. Each inmate has five votes, with a maximum of one per candidate. Therefore, we from the *GB* triumvirate will be nominated. I expect full commitment from each and every one of you until election day. Talk to every German inmate, but also to the decent

foreigners who are intimidated by the *MB*. They should vote for us three."

Geithe spoke up and was given the floor:

"The leader of the MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD won't make it easy for us. Everyone is scared of him. If he nominates his people, he'll make sure they get elected. If you want, I'll take him down. In any case, he has to go—all you have to do is give the order," Geithe, now reformed, offered fervently.

"Thank you, Lars, but that will be my task. If you or someone else does it, there will be war, and we are not prepared for that. We are simply not strong enough yet. But if I challenge him, it will be and remain a battle of honor between two rivals—at least, for our sakes, I hope my plan works out. Regardless, there are no alternatives."

The GERMANIC BROTHERHOOD was thus founded—for better or for worse. From then on, the members appeared together. They claimed a portion of the weight room, and anyone who wanted to go to the student wing had to first report to Lars Geithe and ask for permission. A few members from the other wings were recruited, and many more asked if they could join them. The courtyard was transformed into a large meeting, and for the first time in many years, a counterweight to the *MB* was formed. There were occasional frictions between members of the *GB* and *MB*, but no open confrontations yet.

The *GB* grew stronger daily; in the evenings, they met in Hardenberg's cell to discuss further action. Every Sunday afternoon, everyone met in one of the school rooms in the student wing. Discussions were held, plans were made, and the freedom fighters and great martyrs of Germanic-German history were remembered: from the Cheruscan prince Hermann to Widukind, Andreas Hofer, Rudolf Hess, and Albert Leo Schlageter to Reinhold Elstner. Songs were sung, poems were recited, current polit-

ical and social issues were discussed, and close combat, rhetoric, and the various tactics of the intelligence service were taught. Each member was assigned, among other things, to read General Carl von Clausewitz's "On War"—a must for every political soldier. As with the secret society BFP, Hardenberg strove for an ideological but effective unit.

All members were required to report on their families and loved ones outside. This fostered solidarity, but also prevented the men from playing a double game. Those who were discharged had to continue to serve the *GB*; those who wanted to leave had to assume that other discharged members would one day show up at their doorstep.

Money was a problem, as the *GB* opposed drug trafficking. The *MB* had the financial power, and several officials were on its payroll. This dominance had to be broken. The *GB* introduced large-scale mead and liquor production and quickly seized the lucrative alcohol trade, the far lesser nuisance. Fruit, sugar, and jams were rationed to make distilling more difficult, but honey was plentiful at the prison market. The *GB* purchased all its supplies twice a month. Trade flourished; only cash was accepted, and there was plenty of it in circulation—as in every penal institution.

Military training also progressed well. The *GB* uniformly wore bald heads; their hair was shaved, as it was also a hindrance in combat. This was not an expression of a youth cult, but rather a sign of unity externally and subordination internally. Language, hand signals, and behavior were adapted according to a design by Hardenberg and his deputies.

A *GB* artist designed a coat of arms motif. This was sent by Dagmar von Hagen to a flock printing shop, which produced the black T-shirts. These, in turn, were worn by the numerous girl-

friends of the *GB* members under their own tops during visits and handed over in an unobserved moment.

Married members, who could have their wives come for four hours, were particularly valuable for courier services of all kinds. The "fuck container," as the temporary structure for inti-mate family reunions was affectionately called, was guaranteed to be unguarded and free from eavesdropping.

***“If an intelligent person does not feel dumb
at times, he lacks intelligence.”***

Sword and Desire

Sven Hardenberg was startled when the INTERCOM suddenly barked: "Mr. Hardenberg, z. m.!"

He had to laugh when he heard the announcement from the prison wing officer Kleinhans: *z. m.* = *zu mir!* ("to me!") Kleinhans began to adapt to the language of the GERMANIC BROTHERHOOD. Since Hardenberg now *resided* at the very back in the preferred and larger corner cell with the two windows. "Z. m." was an unusual request—it was probably something important. He walked leisurely to the prison wing office.

"Mr. Kleinhans, what can I do for you?"

"You'd better get yourself a cup of coffee with a shot, you'll need it."

Hardenberg filled a cup and reached for Kleinhans' famous flask, which was already open and ready on the desk.

"Good, I'm all ears."

"You have to go to your girlfriend."

"Dagmar?"

"No, the other friend: Madame Doctor!" Hardenberg looked at Kleinhans dependently.

"The prison psychologist has summoned you to her office," Kleinhans added.

"Office? Just call it treatment room! But seriously, I'm definitely not going there."

Patricia Bach, the professional healer's full name, had avoided Hardenberg in the first few months after the admissions conference. She was deeply confused by his harsh and hurtful words. On the one hand, she vowed not to even look at this uncouth, insensitive, and intimidating bull and to largely ignore him. She

soon had to admit that this plan would not be easy to put into practice as long as she was haunted by thoughts of his words and looks. So she changed tactics and asked him several times to seek her out, which he naturally refused. About ten weeks ago, she appeared in his wing and knocked on his open cell door. By this point, she had long since given up resisting this man, without bothering to analyze the reason for her actions, but she knew that she absolutely had to maintain a protective distance. She asked him for a conversation, and he agreed. She was asked to enter his cell, but she refused—of course, also because it was forbidden. She asked for a chair outside the cell, which he placed for her.

The psychologist asked about his well-being, he asked about hers. Naturally, she received no answers, but that didn't stop her from visiting him more often—as regularly as her time allowed, which she simply took. Kleinhans always smiled when Patricia Bach entered the unholy halls two or three times a week with cake and a smile. The prison wing was pretty much deserted, and so they spoke intimately. She had wisely given up asking him about personal matters, knowing he was superior to her. The two chatted and debated like friends, and it wasn't long before they were on first-name terms.

Their conversations encompassed everything under the sun. She argued Freud, he philosophized Jung; she spoke of resocialization, integration, and a new beginning; he of freedom, purifying storms of steel, and the solitude of the soul, in which the willingness to act and the strength for accomplishment mature. She tried to convince him of the humanistic, altruistic ideas of Kant, while he tried to convey to her the classical will to power of Nietzsche and his spiritual father, Schopenhauer. Only when they turned to the topic of the dangers of social scourging in the form of German sleepiness and the all-suffocating rule of coziness or

Gemütlichkeit did they experience the magic of a supernatural accordance—and not for the last time.

Patricia Bach wondered if Sven Hardenberg was even aware of how much their shared hours of conversation meant to her. Perhaps her professional ambition initially drove her to approach the prisoner on a different level, so that she could ultimately mark him as a successful, useful conclusion to her work—re-socialization successful! As their conversations progressed, this argument faded into the background, giving way to another kind of thought that she still needed to explore further.

"Unfortunately, you have no other choice. I just received a call from the prison director: You have to go. The election for inmate representatives is in three days. Apparently, there's a prison regulation that allows the Psychological Service to decide, on behalf of the prison conference, whether an applicant is suitable to become inmate representative or not."

"What a load of filth. Do the others have to go too?"

"No, only your presence was requested," Kleinhans replied sarcastically, accompanied by a broad smile.

"But it's almost noon..."

"That's why we have to leave immediately. Madame emphasized: *Now!*"

Hardenberg had no choice. Upset, he thought of their agreement that she would never treat him like one of her *patients*. In turn, he no longer saw her solely as a psychologist. After his initial skepticism had subsided, he was increasingly impressed by her persistence, refusing to be intimidated by his refusals, his coldness, and his harsh words, and yet still visiting him regularly. Of all people, he thought he was the last person she would come to good terms with. And now this: she summoned him to her office like an inexperienced schoolboy who'd been up to no good! He had no idea what to make of it.

Kleinhans led him into the administrative wing, where Patricia Bach also had her office. The official knocked and tried to enter, but the door was locked. Footsteps could be heard. Patricia Bach approached the door, unlocked it, and opened it a crack.

"Thank you, Mr. Kleinhans, I'll take over from here. You don't need to fetch Mr. Hardenberg; I'll take him back."

Kleinhans nodded to both of them and walked away—the grin still hadn't faded.

"Hello, Sven."

"Hello, my clever lady. Would you kindly explain to me what this is all about?" he asked with a hint of irritation.

"Of course, but please come in. The hallways here have ears." Patricia Bach opened the door wider and gently pulled him by the forearm into the office. She had made herself even prettier than usual and, as always, wore subtle makeup. It smelled of perfume and delicious food. Hardenberg looked at the desk, then spotted the cozy seating area. The table was set and several candles were burning. The curtains were drawn. His bad mood had suddenly vanished, which was also helped by her next words.

"Please believe me, I didn't want to force you to come see me. I cooked in the staff kitchen and wanted to invite you to lunch, but of course I couldn't have used that as an explanation to the prison officers. Are you happy, Sven?" she asked, buoyed and expectant.

"Yes, I'm very happy, but I'm also stunned. Why are you doing this, Patti?"

"As if you didn't know," she said promisingly. He, however, couldn't make much sense of this vague statement.

"But no psychological debates!"

"Absolutely not, I just want to spend some time with you. Only during lunch break can I be sure we won't be disturbed."

She gently took him by the hand and led him to the corner table. He sat down while she poured the wine.

"Sweetheart, it smells delicious, you look great, and after a long time, I feel like a whole person again, not a marked man. But you're risking your job—you might be risking even more..."

"You always say you have to take risks if you want to experience happiness and freedom. Well, I want to experience what you talked about. Please let's eat before it gets cold."

"I have one last question."

"Please!"

"Did you season it with garlic?" Hardenberg asked cautiously, as the smell of the foreign spice alone usually makes him nauseous. Patricia Bach laughed heartily:

"No, my handsome man, I didn't. As if I didn't know! You once said that your women were allowed to put anything in their mouths—except garlic and chewing gum. I haven't forgotten anything ...!" she said, leaning down, kissing him tenderly, and beginning to serve the delicious food.

They ate, chatted animatedly, clinked glasses and drank, but sometimes they simply remained silent, their gazes lost in each other's. Time passed far too quickly. Satiated and extremely content, Sven Hardenberg leaned back and made himself comfortable on the corner sofa. He still couldn't believe that the beautiful and intelligent psychologist had arranged all this just for him; she had even taken the time to cook for him. Was Patricia Bach trying to tell him that her interest in him was anything but professional? In her presence, he finally felt like a real man again, after so long a time—what more could he wish for?

The civil servant stood up, walked around the table and sat down very close to him.

"Oh, Sven, it's so lovely. I don't understand what you did to me, but I've stopped fighting it."

"Yes, Patti, it is lovely, more than that. You know, I've been behind bars for a year and a half and have often imagined a scenario like this, but the dreams can be worse than torture. For this

day, I thank you ..." He immediately wanted to rise, but she held him back forcefully, giving him no time to protest, and leaned toward him. Gently yet resolutely, she took his head in her hands and kissed him lovingly. When she could no longer detect the slightest resistance in his eyes, she continued her desire and kissed him passionately, demandingly, and longingly—his true hunger was not satisfied. There was a sudden knock at the door.

"Quiet," she whispered, placing her finger to his lips. There was another knock as she soothed him with kisses and caresses, murmuring reassuringly:

"It's okay, they'll assume I'm in the cafeteria. Unfortunately, I have to take you back, but I don't want to, Sven, even if I get fired today ..."

"You can't talk like that, I don't want to leave either, but if they catch us, you'll never get a license to practice again."

"I know, but what should we do?"

She nestled tightly against his broad chest. He pulled her to him and eagerly caressed her body. Both of them were breathing heavily, threatening to lose control. Hardenberg dug his fingers into her thick hair, gently pulled her head back, and kissed her passionately. Oh heavens, how much he had missed this closeness, this physical connection with a female being. He was ready to give himself to her completely, just as she was equally ready to belong to him without a second thought. Despite the passion, he remembered where they were, separated from her with a heavy groan, and stood up as she let out a moving sigh. She watched him longingly; he savored that look, which finally made him forget his last reservations:

"I have an idea. Are you ready for an adventure?"

"Oh, yes!"

"I know the old church warden. He wants to join the *GB*, but he has no chance. The church and the back rooms are empty on Tuesdays. The pastor doesn't come to meetings until the evening. We have the whole afternoon. For a little tobacco or something like that, I can get the keys."

"The church warden? You know why he's in prison?"

"No," Hardenberg said suspiciously.

"He only had three years to serve for fraud, but he brutally murdered his lover and cellmate one summer night twelve years ago. Since he couldn't hoist him onto the top bunk—well, at least not all of him—he stuffed him under his own bed and slept peacefully until the officer found his headless corpse in the morning. For that, he got a life sentence. Please be careful with him."

"Don't worry, I just want the key. I'll definitely avoid any close contact."

"How do you get out of the wing?"

"Kleinhans will take me there. We get along well, very well indeed."

"Oh God, I'm crazy—crazy about you. I'm going to come! What would Freud have said?" she asked excitedly.

"Perhaps he would have said, *'Folly walks on great heights!'*" Hardenberg teased. "I'll be at the church in half an hour. You'll be fifteen minutes later. I don't want you to accidentally run into Kleinhans—he doesn't need to know everything. Come up with an excuse with your colleagues, so they don't page you or possibly come looking for you."

She was barely able to speak, and she was powerless against her own feelings and desires. He was so incredibly attractive; no other man had ever been able to confuse her like that or evoke these kinds of feelings in her, but he remained an eternal mystery to her—and not only to her ...

Thus began this exciting escapade. Patricia Bach took Hardenberg back to his wing. Afterwards, she made phone calls until she learned who had knocked. The hospital doctor wanted to speak to her about an inmate at risk of suicide. She made an appointment with the old quack for late afternoon. Hardenberg went to the church warden, who was initially reserved, but then recep-

tive. He was on his way into the church, but gave Hardenberg the set of keys and received two bottles of mead as a reward. The church was lonely and quiet that Tuesday, and, despite the warmth of late spring, cool; the colorful, decorative stained glass windows hid any view from outside. The rooms behind the sanctuary were empty and accessible only through the main portal. He was churned and could hardly hide it. At this point, he had no eye for the architectural beauty and perfection of the nave, but paced restlessly through the sacred building. He felt like the first time, when he was fourteen and seduced by the pretty au pair from Norway who was staying in a guest room at his parents' estate. A soft knock tore him from his thoughts, and he hurried to the door. Hardenberg let Patricia Bach in. He locked the door and left the large master key in the lock.

Words were not needed; everything happened as if it were a matter of course. It seemed right, natural, pure. After making love for the first time in that church, they both lay naked and exhausted beneath the symbolic cross of a fairytale Hebrew carpenter. Although the two enlightened pagans did not find their way to *this* God, they experienced something truly *godlike*.

ooooo

On the evening of this unforgettable day, there was a knock on the cell door; he barely noticed it and could only with difficulty tear himself out of his invigorating twilight.

"Boss, are you awake?"

Hardenberg barely moved on his bed. Next to him, open and worn, lay a paperback edition of Tacitus's "Germania" which was written in 98 AD. He had read this unique gem of Germanic-German history countless times, but today it remained unnoticed. The music played softly, he stared at the ceiling, savoring the memory of the afternoon with her: every touch, every caress, every taste relived in his mind. It had been so long since he'd experienced anything like this ... and it was good.

"Yes, Rudi."

"Lars and I were worried because you didn't let the guards unlock the door."

"Post coitum triste ..."

"Post what?"

"It's okay, Rudi!" Hardenberg smiled quietly to himself.

"Everything chic, boss?"

"Thank you, everything's fine, comrades, I just have some personal matters I want to settle in peace. I'd like you to schedule a general meeting for tomorrow's yard walk."

"*Jawohl!*" was heard simultaneously, "Good night!"

"Good night, men!"

ooooo

The *GB* met during in the yard. By now, the brotherhood had grown to 21 members, and numerous volunteers and parasites were also on standby. Hardenberg knew, however, that if even the slightest weakness was allowed to sneak in, the bootlickers would hide or even change their minds.

"Here's the thing, gentlemen: The day after tomorrow is the election for the prisoners' representative, and the *MB*'s top guru is exerting enormous pressure in wings two and three. We have wings one and four largely under control, but we cannot risk an *MB* candidate receiving more votes than me, because then he would be entitled to the position of speaker. We must teach the *MB* a lesson. There must not be an open battle. Tomorrow afternoon, because it looks like rain or storm, I expect everyone in the weight room, right after it opens. Prepare yourselves and be ready for anything—they outnumber us at least two to one. I will challenge the leader; you guys watch my back, cover my six, but do not provoke a mass brawl. He does not seem to be very popular with his men—I assess the situation as follows: many are only participating out of fear. They will not be at all unhappy if this show-off, this gelled peacock, gets a dressing down—and it

must be hearty!" His clenched fist struck hard into the palm of his other hand, giving his words the necessary emphasis.

As Hardenberg—with the support of the German Meteorological Service—had predicted, it poured with rain the next day. At 4 p.m. sharp, a bell rang: the daily exercise session began, and the exercise-hungry crowd streamed into the basement gym. The multi-press was the most popular piece of equipment. A young *GB* member was the first to arrive, threw his towel on it, and occupied the bench. Then several *MB* members entered and approached the slight but daring German without hesitation.

"Fuck off, potato!" snapped the *MB* boss, who was used to everyone obeying without question.

"Shut your fucking mouth, you garlic eater!" the boy retorted boldly. "I'll beat you to a cripple!"

"You fucking *Nazi*, I'll punch you so hard ..."

"If you touch me, you'll have shit warm for the last time, you stinking assfucker ..."

There was a small commotion, but the ever-present prison officer intervened. Meanwhile, the *GB* was fully present, and Hardenberg was the last to intervene. The *GB* formed a lane and pushed aside the numerous *MB* members. Hardenberg then approached the *MB* leader and nevertheless took the time to wink at the courageous boy. The officer was about to mediate, but saw the imposing German giant and stepped back.

"Excuse me. What's going on here?" Hardenberg asked, incredibly friendly. The *MB* boss naturally mistook this modesty for weakness and became all the louder and more agitated.

"We are going to train here! You can step off right now!" the great wannabe Khan said stupidly.

Hardenberg examined the many scars on the swollen, misshapen face. These mutilations would have put some off, but Hardenberg knew that it wasn't the man with many scars who was to be feared, but the one who inflicted them. He looked at his youngest *GB* member.

"Wulf, were you the first one here?"

"Yes, indeed!" he announced proudly, in view of the presence of his leader.

"Then the situation is clear: We will train on this machine!" Hardenberg replied gently, knowing full well that this would make the *MB* boss even angrier.

"We'll kill you all, you jerk-off ..." he could hardly be contained now.

A big Turk pinned the security guard from behind in a wrestling grip as he tried to reach the emergency button on the wall. Hardenberg looked around and replied:

"Perhaps you could, but you're a man of honor—I've heard. Then let's settle this between ourselves like two men of integrity and stop arguing like Hottentots!" Hardenberg, who had now reached his desired goal, removed his shirt without any emotion. The steely muscles, the scarred gunshot and stab wounds, and the unique tattoos were admired in awe by those present..

"You know, German potato, I don't have to settle anything with you ..." Hardenberg brushed aside his objections with a resounding backhand slap. The heavy opponent stumbled backward, and Hardenberg addressed them all: "Form a large circle; this only concerns the two of us. If I lose, I want the *GB* to be given safe passage and leave the room together, because then this room will belong to the *MB* for all time to come. However, should I win; I expect the same honorable behavior from the *MB*." Many of the older *MB* members also nodded in agreement—that was how a dispute between grown men had to be settled. That was the concept of honor as they imagined it.

Without warning, the *MB* leader lunged at Hardenberg, who, with lightning speed and superb agility, took a step to the side and let it go into the void. His opponent's impetuosity was shameful, but Hardenberg didn't want to completely humiliate him, lest the feared open battle should break out. He let him approach him slowly. The *MB* leader swung his fists uncontrollably. Harden-

berg deliberately allowed himself to be hit several times and retreated a few controlled steps to reduce the impact of the blows. Then Hardenberg struck his opponent quickly and precisely in the head: first with his right fist, then with his forearm, and finally, standing sideways, with his elbow from below and upwards. As the badly wounded opponent staggered backward, Hardenberg simultaneously kicked his legs out from under him, causing the *MB* leader to land hard on the back of his head and break his left forearm. He raised his hands in front of his face, expecting a kick, which Hardenberg deliberately refrained from doing.

The man lying on the ground slowly propped himself up and tried to get up, but then he saw a dumbbell, grabbed it, and started to attack Hardenberg. Everyone in the room understood that this act was dishonorable—some *MB* members looked away in embarrassment. Geithe, who, like a pit bull, could hardly be restrained, wanted to pounce on his boss's rival. But he was stopped by a look from Hardenberg. The *MB* boss struck wildly, but slowly, because of the additional weight. Instead of retreating, Hardenberg walked into him with a 180° left turn, deflecting the striking arm with his right arm while turning, and landed a direct hit with his left elbow: The cheekbone shattered under the force of the momentum. He then grabbed the man's head and slammed it down, toward his raised knee—the nasal bone audibly and visibly gave way. While the *MB* leader fell to the ground unconscious and bleeding profusely, Hardenberg turned to the *MB* man holding the officer and spoke forcefully: "Let go immediately!" The Turk obeyed immediately, and the supervising guard rushed to the emergency button. Minutes later, the weight room was filled with security officers, the *MB* leader was placed on a stretcher, the *MB* members left the room voluntarily and without hostility, and Hardenberg and the other *GB* men calmly and with their heads held high walked to the exercise equipment.

This fight became legendary, and the all-powerful, superhuman, *Übermensch* standing that Hardenberg detested as much as he rejected was finally cemented with reinforced concrete.

ooooo

The election was over—the *GB* triumvirate took the first three places. The prisoners' representative body consisted of six members. Hardenberg, of course, was the spokesperson or *speaker*. The *MB* managed to place two members, who, however, behaved pleasantly reserved and genuinely wanted to improve conditions for the inmates. Since the *MB* leader was dismantled and transferred to Bruchsal Prison in southern Germany after a lengthy hospital stay, the *MB* had been quiet, but not disappeared. Due to its high membership numbers, it remained dangerous and thus omnipresent. However, since the deputy who had restrained the officer in the weight room was also forcibly transferred, the MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD was temporarily leaderless.

The sixth member of the inmates' council, who surprisingly stood for election and was actually elected, was an elderly Rhinelander who claimed to have been convicted of tax evasion and fraud. However, guard Kleinhans informed Hardenberg that he was serving time for years of raping his nine-year-old stepdaughter. This individual experienced hell at the first meeting. All five expressed the same opinion—with rock-solid emphasis. Afterward, he resigned silently and without public explanation, and his seat on the inmates' council remained vacant. The "childfucker" allowed himself to be locked in his cell, choosing voluntary Isolation, and received the infamous red nameplate on his cell door—he was never seen again by the general population.

A certain stability came to the institution: an era of peace and order. The *MB* continued its drug dealing, the drag queens continued to sell their bodies, the child molesters continued to bake their cakes, the students continued to try to graduate, and admis-

sions and dismissals could be observed daily. But much had also changed. The GERMANIC BROTHERHOOD was the power, and its members were treated with respect. When they came, the others had to make way—yet no one was harassed or intimidated. They only took action when absolutely necessary—but then they did so consistently.

The *GB* didn't want to appear pious, but it did stand up against injustice. If the *MB* or one of the smaller groups had a problem with a German inmate, they came to the *GB* first. Hardenberg and his deputies decided whether an inmate would receive support or not. The prison officers had turned away from the weakened *MB* and were now on the *GB*'s payroll. This was the only way to break this Muslim power.

Most correctional officers, however, worked with the *GB* for free, sometimes out of sympathy and sometimes out of self-preservation, because if they had difficulties with an errant prisoner, they only had to go to the *GB*. This was less dangerous than intervening themselves. New German arrivals had to present themselves to the *GB* triumvirate on their first day. They were assessed; only a few were suitable for the particular brotherhood, but above all, they were taught: Any German who took sides against Germans or agitated without the *GB*'s consent would become obsolete. Of course, the prison administration knew about it, but accepted this devil's pact, as was usual in such shadowy worlds. The GERMANIC BROTHERHOOD was clearly the lesser evil; mead sales were limited, and the *GB*'s small businesses were nothing compared to the terror regime of the former *MB* leader.

Even the prison administration had its limits of tolerance. At the end of October, in the second year of his incarceration, Hardenberg's time had come.

"Mr. Hardenberg, I hate to disturb you ..."

"No problem, Mr. Kleinhans, I'm happy to welcome you—but I was actually expecting someone prettier," he said mischievously.

"Yes, I know who you were expecting, but something has come up ..." the officer said, ill at ease. Sven Hardenberg sensed Kleinhans's discomfort, and his antennae sounded the alarm..

"What's wrong?"

"You have to come with me, we have to go to the boss."

"I want to know what it's about beforehand."

"Unfortunately, I'm not allowed to tell you, but if you think about it for a moment, you'll figure it out."

"I was expecting Patricia, but since she didn't come, it might be about her ..."

"Your powers of deduction are unique," Kleinhans said, satisfied and relieved. If Hardenberg hadn't thought of it, he would have told him anyway.

The prisoner remained composed, but his stomach rebelled. He wasn't afraid for himself, only for her. He felt no real love, but great affection and desire. His heart undeniably belonged to Dagmar von Hagen, but the fire in his loins and the wild, primal Germanic desire of a warrior belonged to *Miss Dr. Patricia Bach*.

"I assume everyone is waiting for me?"

"As usual, your assumptions are quite accurate," Kleinhans replied seriously.

Kleinhans led Hardenberg into the prison director's office, but stayed outside. Surprisingly, only the director, the head of prison administration as well as guards, and Patricia Bach were present, so Hardenberg believed things couldn't be that bad with this small group. Only when he saw her tear-stained face did he realize everything had been discovered. Patricia Bach stood up and, regardless of the situation, threw herself into his arms. Now she was no longer alone and exposed to the inquisitive scrutiny of her colleagues. His strength was also hers; her shame instantly vanished. Hardenberg gave her a sincere hug and led her back to her chair.

The prison director cleared his throat:

"Please take a seat, Mr. Hardenberg."

Hardenberg moved the chair closer to her and she offered him her delicate hand, seeking support.

"I'm ready!" said the *GB* boss without further ado.

"Please, don't sound so gloomy, it won't be that bad. I see you know what this is about. Your behavior also confirms my information. Since Dr. Bach has admitted everything, there's no need to beat around the bush."

Hardenberg and Patricia Bach looked at each other.

"Please forgive me, Sven, but I couldn't, and I didn't want to, lie ..."

"There is no reason for that."

"Mr. Hardenberg, you have created order here, and I appreciate it, which is also why you are given a lot of leeway, but a sexual relationship with a staff member, with the prison psychologist, is strictly forbidden ..." said the prison director with a touch of jealousy, as his advances were always ignored.

"I ask you to place full responsibility on me, it was my fault..."

"Are you saying that you raped Miss Bach?" the otherwise meek prison administrator, the *VDL*, interjected sharply.

"Not in this tone and at this level!" admonished the prison director, who did not want to make Hardenberg angry and wanted to continue to rely on the *GB* in the future.

The psychologist immediately clarified: "Mr. Hardenberg bears no guilt; I wanted it and pursued my goal ..."

"I'm aware of that now, dear colleague, but it's no longer of interest. Now I'll tell you how we're going to proceed, and I won't allow myself to be dealt with: I could reprimand Mr. Hardenberg, even transfer him, but he hasn't committed any crime, whereas you have violated your oath of office. If I wanted to, I could initiate proceedings, and then you'd be out of favor in this country—not to mention your license to practice medicine. We can't afford this kind of negative publicity here, and that's the only reason I'll handle this internally. What we discuss today will remain confi-

dential. You two meet regularly at the church; according to my information, this has been going on for at least three months ..."

"Five months and three days," Patricia Bach corrected confidently.

"Oh, well, I didn't want to know that much either, but thank you for clarifying. You, Miss Bach, will submit your release request today. After this conversation, you will hand over your keys and leave the institution, and from now on, you will not be authorized to enter. Your personal belongings will be packed and carried to your vehicle. Your files will remain here. Your successor will call you to discuss the pending cases—I trust you will be of assistance. I hope you agree with this course of action, otherwise I would have to act differently!"

Patricia slumped and squeezed Hardenberg's hand even tighter.

"Yes, I agree, and thank you for your generosity and understanding. Would you grant me one last request?"

"Which would be?"

"I'd like to speak to Sven privately for five more minutes."

"Okay, five minutes. We'll leave you two alone, but we'll be at the door."

The prison director and his shadow, the executive assistant, left the office. Patricia Bach stood up and sat on Hardenberg's lap, hugged him, and wept uncontrollably.

"We have been betrayed ..." sighs Patricia Bach

"Yes, and I know who it must have been! A dog-like German!" Hardenberg replied disappointedly.

"It's sad that you can't trust anyone anymore."

"That's not sad, it's just one of the most important rules of this damned life since the dawn of humanity: You can't trust anyone. No one!" Hardenberg said bitterly.

"You can always trust me! I don't want to lose you, please tell me I won't lose you..." Hardenberg felt for her, but he didn't want to lie to her, or hurt her any further. He gently took her face in both hands and wiped away her tears with his thumbs.

"Everything will be fine! The director of the institution has been very accommodating, so you'll be able to get back on your feet in your profession quickly. We knew we were taking a big risk, and I haven't regretted it for a second."

"Neither do I, my beloved. I've never known such deep love, I never thought such a feeling really existed. Who betrayed us?"

"It can only have been one person, and I will solve the problem my way—believe me. I won't say any more, since I assume this room is bugged. You don't think we can say goodbye here for nothing, do you?" Immediately, there was a knock at the door, which Hardenberg had expected. The psychologist looked disdainfully toward the entering prison director and his head prison officer. Then she whispered to Hardenberg:

"I'll write to you every day, and I'll visit you. Your birthday is on Tuesday—they won't be able to stop me! You have my phone number, please call as often as you can. No matter what you need, I'm always there for you ...!"

"Doctor Bach, the *VDL* will now accompany you to the security sluice, where boxes with your personal belongings will be waiting for you," said the prison chief calmly.

Hardenberg helped her up, as she didn't move. They kissed passionately one last time. He handed her a small gift unseen, then gently pushed her toward the door, which closed behind her forever on this Thursday, the last day of October. They parted with dignity. He lost the woman he had once despised at the beginning of their first meeting for her unscrupulousness, but who, with her warmth and love, had shown him that he was important, not dispensable, and not just a number on some file. He was infinitely grateful to her, felt a deep and eternal connection for the fact that she had succeeded in making him human again. Based on these feelings, he gave her the most precious possession he possessed behind these walls. Sven Hardenberg sadly suspected that he had seen Patricia Bach for the last time ...

"I'm sorry, Mr. Hardenberg, but I had no choice but to act like this," the director interrupted his thoughts when the two were, unusually, alone together.

"I understand you could have acted very differently. I sincerely thank you for your magnanimity."

"Miss Bach is a very nice person, and I didn't want to end her career like this. We're all human, and I understand love—I'm no exception."

"What consequences can I expect?"

"None at all, because you've both been punished enough already. Dr. Bach will not be allowed as a visitor, and letters from her will be withheld until your release. Telephone calls with her will not be authorized. I hope you understand this course of action and will not use any other means of communication. I want to protect Miss Bach, because if she maintains contact with you, the whole story will become known, and then I would have to file an official report."

Hardenberg wondered if this head overseer knew about the GB's two cell phones. In any case, he was right: contact would be dangerous for Patricia Bach and would only delay the pain of the sealed separation.

"Thank you again!" The two men shook hands.

Hardenberg left the director's office and was led back to the wing by Kleinhans.

"I want to see that old bum, the church warden, is he working or in the wing?"

Kleinhans looked at Hardenberg cautiously.

"He is no longer in this institution. His transfer was ordered unexpectedly this morning."

"Where to?"

"To the open ward within the framework of the work release program."

"I understand, the *kiss of Judas* is also richly rewarded by the prison administration ..."

"He's a pathetic old drunk. Whatever he's done, please don't ruin your position. The bastard isn't worth it."

"Your wisdom honors you, but we shall see—we shall see ..."
Hardenberg announced in such a disturbing manner that it gave Kleinhans goosebumps.

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As promised, Patricia Bach wrote daily, and she also tried to force a visitation permit, but her request was denied. She never received the expected call, but she wasn't angry with Hardenberg, as she rightly assumed he was prevented from contacting her by phone or mail. For nearly two months, she tried everything to see the man of her dreams again—but in vain. On Christmas Eve, she visited her parents at Lake Starnberg. The celebration was melancholic for her, and she missed her lover so painfully that she could no longer bear the agonizing heartache. That night, she fell asleep with a mischievous little smile and dreamed of him lovingly kissing her, and of his arms, in which she felt so fulfilled and so complete.

The next morning she was found by her mother. The consulted emergency physician who rushed to the scene could only confirm her death. She hadn't suffered, but had been gently welcomed into the darkness, aided by the bottle of Baden red wine and the numerous sleeping pills. She left no suicide note. This is one of the reasons why her parents never learned the reason for her actions, and thus Sven Hardenberg remained uninformed. Patricia Bach's shocked parents attached no importance to the large ring on her necklace, bearing the family crest, which was unknown to them and which she clutched tightly, but decided to enclose the jewelry with her in eternal rest. They couldn't have known that their daughter had received this ring from the great love of her life on the last day of their togetherness, and that this precious item therefore represented her greatest treasure ...

Death on Silent Soles

Almost three years had now passed since his arrest on that cold, snowy December morning in Berlin. In contrast to the previous one, he had celebrated his birthday in November with his comrades in a lavish manner: the mead flowed lavishly, the songs were loud, and the spirits were high.

Hardenberg occasionally thought of Patricia Bach, from whom he hadn't heard in over a year, but he knew he had made the right decision. He hoped she was well and that she had a lucrative job. Civil service would have worn her down, so perhaps the exposure of the affair had some benefit.

His relationship with Dagmar von Hagen became even more intense than he could have ever imagined. She had become friends with his parents and visited them regularly—united in their love for the political prisoner.

The GERMANIC BROTHERHOOD recently had problems with two security officers who demanded more money for turning a blind eye. Hardenberg had to act, otherwise their greed would know no bounds and spread to others. The MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD still had significantly more financial resources due to its drug trafficking. Such competition would have been fatal.

Several *GB* members had already been released from prison, and others had joined. The free brothers did their duty and supported the *GB* wherever they could. Hardenberg commissioned Dagmar von Hagen to research addresses and personal data: of the prison director, the prison administrator, and of numerous security officers.

It had now become necessary to have a trump card against unruly and unjust officials. The *GB* sent a few men to the homes of the neighboring security guards, an elegant terraced housing development on the outskirts of the city. They clamped a clear warning sign under the windshield wipers of their vehicles parked in front of the homes. The next day, the two guards asked to speak with Hardenberg. They offered him the opportunity to work without pay in the future. But Hardenberg refused. He didn't want to exploit them, because anyone who pretended to be united only out of fear or intimidation was a danger to everyone—and anything but trustworthy. Therefore, these guards received the same fee as before, but not a single cent more.

Lars Geithe had served the *GB* well and became a true friend to Hardenberg. He played a key role in expanding the brotherhood and relieved his boss of his minor worries. He sorted out the issues that would bother Hardenberg. He was also the one who fought the minor battles that barely needed to be reported. His sister, the only one who visited him regularly, had begun her studies in Heidelberg that fall. His relationship with her was far closer than his relationship with his parents, who divorced while he was in prison. He wanted to be close to her and asked Hardenberg for advice, who naturally encouraged him to apply for a transfer for family reunification. Geithe would undoubtedly be a loss, but Hardenberg understood him well and did not object to the request, as otherwise Geithe would have stayed.

"Are you sure I should go?"

"Yes, of course, my friend. There are things in life that are more important than what our little world embodies on the fringes of real existence—and your intimate relationship with your sister is one of them. She needs you, and you have to set priorities, which I fully support."

"I can hardly tell you what the last eighteen months have meant to me. That's one of the reasons why this decision is so dif-

ficult for me, because I feel like I'm letting you and the *GB* down," Geithe said dejectedly.

"Nonsense! You're not abandoning us—quite the opposite. You'll set up a *GB* section in the new institution. I'll give you money and everything else you need. You'll have to rule there, for all our sakes! Lars, meeting you was like an inner march-past for me! See you outside—in freedom..." They embraced fraternally.

"I will do everything I can in your place," said Geithe, obviously overwhelmed. Now Hardenberg also became solemn:

"No, Lars, you must and will lead our brotherhood to the meadow that you consider best. May Donar's hammer and Wodan's *ger* always be with you, my friend!"

There was a boozy farewell party at the end of November, but above all, there was intensive training from Hardenberg, as Geithe was supposed to have the best possible conditions at the new prison.

At first, Geithe wanted to go to Mannheim, but the prison there refused. The high-security prison in Bruchsal, on the other hand, was willing to accept him. However, the former *MB* head was suspected of being there. Geithe was pleased, as he still had a score to settle with him.

This bill was paid a few weeks later— in full and with interest. The old *MB* leader was grateful when he was finally deported home, *remigrated*. Lars Geithe managed to expand the GERMANIC BROTHERHOOD in Bruchsal very quickly, and Hardenberg devotedly supported him via correspondence, providing him with all the necessary information.

Yuletide was approaching, and the mood in the prison was, as always at this time of year, somewhat disheartened. One inmate seemed to fear the approaching time of reflection. Hardenberg

sensed his distress and suspected that disaster rarely comes alone.

"Rudi, please come into my cell. Fritz, you will receive supper for Rudi. We don't want to be disturbed; we have something to discuss!"

"Yes, boss, I'll put someone out the door," replied the zealous brother.

Hardenberg closed the cell door, pointed to the chair and sat down next to Rudi.

"Rudi! Report!"

The startled deputy jumped up again.

"What, but, what ..."

Hardenberg smiled reassuringly and pointed to the chair again.

"Well, my friend, I suspect you have a mental kink. What's wrong? Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"Well, I just think it's a shame that Lars is gone. We became good friends, but please don't let my gloom upset you."

"I feel the same way, Rudi, but it had to be done. I received another letter from him today, and things are going well."

"That's what I thought. I knew Lars would make it; he's a good leader. May I see the letter?"

"Of course, I wanted to go through it with you later, but now let's move on to another topic. Have you thought about who you'd like to have in the triumvirate?"

"I've been watching everyone closely over the last week, and Friedrich has stood out. He may be 48 and a 'Russia German,' but he enjoys a certain respect among the others. He's also shown that he's no fool, and he acts with caution. But when necessary, he's on his toes."

"Germans from Russia are also Germans, well, at least most of them. Why was Steiner convicted? You know how forgetful I am sometimes ..." He winked at his comrade.

"Armed bank robbery... and manslaughter. Fifteen years."

"Exactly. Exactly. What kind of education does he have?"

"He's currently completing his secondary school leaving certificate and is by far the best in his class."

"Good, very good! We'll meet with him this weekend," said Hardenberg, pondering how to bring the conversation back to the personal. After a brief consideration, he decided to go on the offensive:

"Rudi, I'll ask you straight out: What's bothering you? I can see very clearly that your thoughts have been elsewhere for some time. It's as if your mind and spirit have been permanently traveling. We all go through this phase, but with you, this state seems to be persistent."

Rudi looked at his boss dismally.

"Are you saying that I have neglected my duties?"

"Certainly not. You've only neglected one duty: the duty to share your burden among your brothers—that's what we're here for. Shared suffering is truly half the suffering, even if it may be difficult to share."

Rudi thought for a moment and then gathered courage:

"You're right ... I'm worried, Sven, very worried. My wife hasn't written for two weeks. During our weekly calls, I can barely get her on the phone. She's putting the kids first, and I'm happy about that—I love my children madly, and I love my wife madly—but I feel like I'm losing her. I don't want to be a cuckolded husband, like so many prisoners. Yesterday I was allowed to call, and she was acting totally weird, didn't want to talk at all. I kept asking what had happened, why she hadn't written, and she just gave evasive answers, like 'I don't know,' 'I didn't have time,' and so on. In the end, she said she would write to me, and now I can't find peace."

"Rudi, she's been loyal to you during the two and a half years you've been in prison so far, hasn't she? Why should that change now? If I remember correctly, you'll be released in seven months on a two-thirds sentence?"

"It's actually only six and a half months away. You're right, but I still have a really bad feeling. My family is my everything. I've

made a lot of mistakes, but the hope of having my family back has given me strength and kept me going."

"Maybe it's just the time of year. In less than two weeks, it's the 'Festival of Reflection and Light.' Your wife will be sad to have to spend the Christmas holidays without you again. But it will be the last time. Don't give up hope."

"Your word in God's ear!"

"You mean in the ears of the gods?"

"Of course!" Rudi smiled. "Thank you. The conversation really did me good!"

"Thank you for your trust, Rudi—and now get out of here, it's almost time for lock up, and above all, I urgently need to drop a big log!"

Both friends laughed easily. Hardenberg led his deputy to the door with a friendly hug. The food cart was parked in front, but Hardenberg waved the two food servers on. He wasn't hungry. The officer wished him a good night and locked the door. The conversation left Hardenberg with an uneasy feeling, but he couldn't pinpoint the exact cause, at least not that evening—he wouldn't get a second chance.

Rudi Winckler went to his cell. He had just made it without his legs giving way. It had taken him tremendous effort to gather his last strength so as not to lose his composure in front of his boss and friend. Hardenberg was already burdened enough; he didn't want to burden him with his worries. Since the cells would be closed this evening, Rudi Winckler prepared himself for a long night. He cooked water with the immersion heater and added instant coffee, unwrapped cookies that he had found in his mother's very early Christmas package, and sat down at the small table.

He looked at the letter spread out before him. Yes, Simone had promised to write, and the letter was already on its way when they spoke on the phone yesterday. He had received it at the mail

distribution counter during his lunch break, and even before opening it, he had suspected what it would contain—and his worst fears had become a reality: Simone not only wanted to leave him and take the children with her, she had also broken off contact with his parents because of arguments. But above all, she wrote to him that she had cheated on him, was newly in love, and wanted to move with the new man she had met online to his southern European homeland.

It was like a slap in the face. His beloved family was gone, and he was imprisoned, powerless, and expected to endure everything. He hadn't even been able to reveal it to his boss during their conversation.

He thought about escaping, but he didn't know how. He had spoken to Hardenberg about this topic weeks ago, but Hardenberg had rejected such a suggestion, believing that a man must be able to endure his fate. Hardenberg admitted that he too had a strong desire for freedom, but anyone who escaped would not be free, but forever hunted—which would be worse than prison. This was also why he successfully concealed the truth from his friend, fearing that his friend might still take a rash step out of camaraderie. He couldn't allow Hardenberg to risk everything to help him attempt an escape!

Night approached, and he didn't want to postpone his decision, lest his courage fail him. During the last weeks of unrest, the prison quack gave him daily tablets for palpitations, which he didn't take—but he had kept them. He organized his cell. It was clean and tidy, just as he usually was inside. His bed was neatly made, his shoes polished, and the last letters written.

He looked at the twenty tablets he had lined up. A rush of adrenaline seized him; he began to shake uncontrollably and was unable to move or speak. Some might consider this reaction cow-

ardice, but the opposite is usually the case. When the attack was over, he felt a sense of elation and victory over his own mind. Calm returned, and he knew the time had come.

He stood up and walked to the sink, looked in the dim, tarnished mirror, and reassured himself of his decision one last time. He filled a cup with water and grabbed the pills, which he swallowed in one go. Then he neatly put the cup back in place. He lit the candle, which was also in the package, and turned off the overhead light.

The music in the background had a calming effect on him. He lay down on the bed, careful not to crumple the blanket too much. From under his pillow, he took out the prepared plastic bag containing two strong rubber bands that he had brought from work. Now he waited and reflected on his life. He saw his loving parents, his wife, his three blonde angels, whom he adored. He saw his brothers from the *GB*, who always stood by his side, and he saw what his life could have become if only he had avoided the temptations of vice.

The written disaster at midday had emasculated him. In the face of the adversity, he suffered for many hours with the pain of his soul and heart, but now, knowing it would soon be over, he felt free and unburdened. He would no longer stand in the way of his wife and children's happiness.

Fatigue quickly overcame him; he could barely keep his eyes open. With his last ounce of strength, he pulled the bag over his head, then the rubber bands. His breathing was steady, the anesthesia doing its job.

In the end, he understood the great truth of existence: the pain that life cannot heal, death does. Peace mercifully welcomed Rudi Winckler with open arms.

A shout from nowhere:

"Mr. Hardenberg, get up! Quick, you have to come with me!" Hardenberg rushed out of bed, slipped into his flip-flops, and, wearing only his pajama pants, followed Kleinhans, who was running ahead with astonishing agility. He stopped at a cell but didn't go in.

Hardenberg recognized the cell and looked at the officer, who, however, kept his head lowered. He went in—he would never forget this horrific sight. He had seen many dead people, but to see a close friend choose suicide in this way was an almost unbearable experience. His face was unrecognizable because the bag had condensed on the inside. He averted his agonized gaze.

As he looked around and at the table, he saw several envelopes neatly lined up: addressed to Rudi's parents, to his wife and children—and also an envelope addressed to the *GB*, which he slipped into his pocket unnoticed, as it would otherwise be confiscated.

Winckler's wife's letter, which Hardenberg knew nothing about, lay open next to the sealed envelopes. Hardenberg picked up the sheet of paper and read the few, harrowing lines. These explained everything to him, and he felt an unpredictable hostility toward this woman, coming from deep within his heart. At the same time, Hardenberg felt a mixture of contempt, but also admiration, for his brother's resolute courage. A courage he would not have been able to muster—and had not mustered back then, in a time of spiritual darkness ...

Outside, footsteps could be heard approaching rapidly: security officers and the prison administrator were on their way; neither the prison warden nor his deputy were present this early. Har-

denberg looked at his friend one last time and briefly touched his hands, which rested peacefully on his stomach.

"Mr. Hardenberg, you have to go!" Kleinhans warned. Sven obeyed immediately and absentmindedly walked past the assembled officials, who willingly made way.

When he reached his cell, the other *GB* members of the student wing were waiting for their leader.

"Boss, what happened? Is something wrong with Rudi?" Hardenberg looked downcastly at Friedrich and the other brothers, but he answered calmly:

"Gentlemen, Rudi has chosen voluntary death. We'll discuss the reasons later. There will be a dignified farewell ceremony on Saturday—let everyone know, I'll reserve the prisoners' representative room for us." The men looked dolefully at their boss. "It will be a difficult time, but we mustn't despair, and above all, we mustn't show any outward weakness, because the *MB* is getting stronger and stronger since this would-be imam arrived, and they're just waiting for an opportunity to find us without our shields. But we're not exposing our Achilles heel, just our iron fist. Fritz, please come in with me, the others will have breakfast and then off to the classrooms! Dismissed!" The heels rang out in unison.

"Fritz, please heat up some water for coffee, I want to show you something."

Hardenberg took out the envelope and opened it. Inside were 300 euros and a photo of Rudi, Lars, and Hardenberg at the prison's sports festival, embracing each other and smiling, braving the adversities of daily prison life. On the back was the inscription: "Don't forget me—brotherhood in life and in death!" Both were shaken and drank their coffee in silence. Finally, Hardenberg told his new deputy about the motives for the suicide.

"Maybe I should have noticed. He's had been so weird, so sad lately."

"How could you have noticed, boss? You have to take care of every little detail here. Everyone wants something from you. Everyone relies on you to always get everything done. But if someone doesn't want to tell you something, you can't somehow magically predict it—even though some people expect that. Please don't blame yourself; you couldn't have done anything, because even if Rudi had told you clearly, his decision was made—and we have to accept that."

Hardenberg looked at his prospective deputy with appreciation and was pleased to see that this personnel decision was more than correct.

"You're right, Fritz. Thank you for your words."

"I just never thought he would be so weak."

"Weak? Dear Fritz, there's a difference between a weakling and a broken man!"

"Sorry, now you're right, of course ..."

"You don't need to apologize. You must and should always be honest with me, but I don't want to hear such words from the others. I hereby appoint you as my deputy, and I expect your full commitment during these difficult times."

Friedrich Steiner stood up and spoke solemnly:

"*Jawohl!* You can rely on me one hundred percent."

"I know that, Fritz, but we still need a third man for the triumvirate—but I will choose him carefully and take my time."

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Four days before the Holy Night of the Christians, there was a lavish farewell feast, which Kleinhans and a few other prison officers also attended. The mead flowed freely. They sang and joked in honor of their dead brother, as was customary among the Germanic tribes. A few tears were shed, but they were bashfully wiped away so as not to diminish the respect shown for the deceased.

On Sunday, everyone had a heavy head, but no one was complaining. Kleinhans was on duty and barely left his office. A phone call disturbed the deathly silence. The wing chief called for the *GB* leader, but he didn't move, so Kleinhans had to go the long way to the back of the wing.

"Mr. Hardenberg, we drank like robber barons ... and my throat is sore from all the '*Heiling* around,' as you call it. I hope you have as bad a headache as I do."

"Probably much worse. Would you like a cup of coffee?" Sven chuckled inwardly. Yes, there was indeed a lot of "*Heiling*" going on, and the prison guards had been particularly enthusiastic about participating.

"No, thank you. The shift supervisor just called me and told you that the director of the institution has granted Simone Winckler special permission for a visit tomorrow. Mrs. Winckler would like to speak with you about her husband. I should ask you if you would like to accept the visit?"

Hardenberg didn't make the decision lightly. He wondered if he would be able to control him-self, but he didn't want to avoid the meeting. He was determined to face the challenge the next day.

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"Mr. Hardenberg? May I call you Sven?" asked Simone Winckler, trying to win him over with a smile.

"Only my friends are allowed to call me that, and we are surely not friends," said Hardenberg, completely abandoning his usual inimitable charm:

"My time is limited, what can I do for you?"

"I don't understand your hostile attitude, but I would like to know how my husband had been doing these past few weeks, as I don't understand his actions."

"His actions? His actions? He put a goddamn bag over his head and suffocated miserably! What don't you understand about

that?" Hardenberg almost shouted. Simone Winckler looked up in surprise, tears welling up in her eyes.

"Yes, but why did he do that? I don't understand why? The children ..."

"Why? You stupid bitch! Are you saying you didn't know what you and the children meant to him? He only had a few months left, but you had to think with your selfish cunt instead of your heart. When you wrote to him barely a week and a half before Christmas to say you had a new boyfriend and wanted to move to Greece with him, you destroyed this brave man who would have done anything for you and his family. In the end, however, he triumphed because he summoned the courage one last time to decide his own life and made the only decision with which he could to preserve what little human dignity he had left! But *you* will never understand that ...!"

During this fiery accusation, Sven Hardenberg had risen vigorously from his chair and was now leaning threateningly over her, resting both fists on the table.

"I'm sorry, so sorry ..." stammered Simone Winckler, shrinking further and further back in her chair because of his withering look.

"Frankly, I don't give a shit!" he yelled back.

Hardenberg had completely lost his composure and was a little ashamed of it. He bowed his head briefly, closed his eyes, and took a deep breath. This ritual helped him calm down again, even though there were very few events in his life that compelled him to resort to such a method.

Now that his heart rate had slowed and he was completely in control again, he carefully adjusted his chair, which had tipped over during his impulsive sentence, and sat down.

"You should be sorry too—and you should suffer! If you truly feel remorse, then raise the children in Rudi's spirit. Teach them the values of family, loyalty, and honor, the values you have trampled on. And don't run away like a coward, but take responsibility—and then perhaps you will experience forgiveness."

He took an envelope from the hiding place under his shirt and placed it on the table. Inside was a short letter and the 300 euros from Rudi, which the GERMANIC BROTHERHOOD wanted to send to the children as a Christmas present.

Hardenberg stood up, roughly grasped Simone Winckler's chin with his right hand, and turned her face toward his relentlessly cold eyes. They looked at each other silently, and she understood. They both understood.

The Attack

Sven Hardenberg saw her approaching and impatiently rose from his chair. In joyful anticipation, he could almost measure the steps she would still need to take to finally be close to him again. She threw herself into his waiting arms and refused to let go, as she did with each of their precious visits. He, too, embraced her lovingly and was barely able to release her from his embrace.

"Hello, my darling! I'm late, my flight was delayed." Dagmar von Hagen kissed him passionately. Hardenberg sat down, and she moved her chair as close to him as physically possible.

"How are you? It's so tragic, what happened to Rudi. Even worse is the fact that you weren't allowed to attend the funeral. I cried when I read your lines—and believe me, I shared your pain."

"Thank you; you can hardly imagine how good it is to see you. Your beautiful countenance brightens my heart ..." Hardenberg said in a rare burst of poetry, watching her enchanting eyes light up with delight.

"I think it's a disgrace that I couldn't visit you earlier. How can the institution simply refuse requests for visits between 15 December and 15 January?"

"This is due to the fact that many civil servants take leave to be with their children during the school holidays. So there are staff shortages, which I can understand, but the loneliness over the holidays is terrible."

"I know that, my beloved. I was with my parents at Wannsee over Christmas, but I couldn't find peace without you. My thoughts were with you every second—believe me! That's another reason I want to discuss something with you: I'm moving to Hamburg to be near you!"

Hardenberg was unprepared for this announcement and needed a few moments to think.

"No, you won't. There's only about nineteen months left—we'll get through that time, darling. I need you in Berlin, because that is where you belong. And whether here or there, visits are limited to twice a month. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your offer, but I can't and won't allow that."

Hardenberg looked at her, and Dagmar von Hagen gazed at him admiringly. She loved him all the more for his selflessness. She nodded resolutely:

"I'll do what you think is right ..."

"I know, baby!"

"You call me 'baby'?" she asked with a radiant smile.

"This is one of my few concessions to the *Zeitgeist*," said Hardenberg, winking ambiguously.

"How are you getting on with your writing?"

"Actually, I've written concepts for at least eight novels. I've finished the beginning and ending for two manuscripts."

"That's sensational! Can I read some of it, darling?"

"Not yet, my dear, but I could now imagine us writing something together. I have the inspiration and the creativity; you have the writing skills and, above all, the experience. I've read the articles you sent me several times and am impressed by your ability to use language effectively."

She deliberately ignored the compliment because she wasn't sure how to respond, but she did notice that she blushed a little. Her enthusiasm for his suggestion grew all the greater:

"Oh yes, Sven, I would love to work with you on such a project—the main thing is, together." Her eyes flashed with eagerness. But then she looked serious, as if she were concerned about his reaction to her next words:

"I have something to tell you now: I've been designing an online homepage in your honor for some time now. Your political career and your martyrdom are honored there. Many of your original texts have been published. Last week, as webmaster, I recorded the millionth access from over 45 countries. Many hun-

dreds of emails with expressions of solidarity have arrived and are waiting for you upon your release. I hope you don't mind?"

"Mind? Hundreds of emails? I'm thrilled," said Hardenberg, "and I'm infinitely grateful. I'll take a look at the *Weltnetz* page in the computer room tomorrow."

"What is a *Weltnetz*?"

"The Internet, the world wide web, my beloved *net mistress*, but you have already been completely re-educated by the culture-poor modernism full of anglicisms ..."

"You'll get me back on track, my *great German* ...!"

They both laughed heartily and kissed again.

"How could I have been so lucky in misfortune? I think meeting you is the best thing that ever happened to me..." Hardenberg whispered subtly.

"Then I am reassured—and happy. Sometimes a deep fall *does* lead to a greater salvation!" she said cheerily.

Hardenberg tenderly stroked her rosy cheek as they exchanged deep glances of connection and unity.

"How's the brotherhood going? Do you have your men under control?"

"Well, you know how it is: I'm elevated to a supernatural pedestal and bear all the responsibility. The guys see more in me than I actually am, and if I didn't live up to their own utopian expectations, they'd quickly be disappointed and most likely become my adversaries. It's lonely at the top ... and thankless, but I wouldn't have it any other way—my strength and my weakness at the same time."

"Please, darling, take care of yourself. If something happened to you, I don't know what I would do ..."

"Don't worry, I have everything under control. Still, this sieved air is making me sick. Please tell me about the New Year's Eve party!" he said, continuing to succumb to the fascination it exerted on him. "Don't leave out any details, then I'll relive the celebration in my mind, as if we were there together."

She told them about the flight to Mallorca. His parents had invited her, and she spent a wonderful time there at the Hardenbergs' holiday villa. Naturally, the main topic was Sven: his childhood and school days, the things he'd gotten up to as a rascal, his strengths, his weaknesses, and his uniqueness. As midnight struck and the New Year was welcomed, they toasted him and wept with joy at the thought that in two years at the latest, at the next New Year's celebration, he would be the center of their intimate circle.

Dagmar von Hagen was neither innocent nor untouched, and she knew love, especially the passionate love of youth, but what she intended to give this man was virginal. Only now did she know what love truly meant: For if this word meant that the well-being of another was more important than one's own, and that one was equally capable of giving one's life for another, then Sven Hardenberg was her first love—her only love.

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Springtime approached, and tensions between the GERMANIC BROTHERHOOD and the MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD grew daily. When a criminal imam, a scholar of Islam, was admitted in the last quarter of last year, the structures of the *MB* solidified, as its members rallied around the new self-appointed leader. He was considered the groundbreaker and preached hatred. While the Muslim inmate wasn't particularly anti-German, he wanted to regain power in the institution. There had been several minor disputes, but the *GB* cracked down harshly and brutally.

The Russia Germans, the *Aussiedler*, kept to themselves. Very few of them had German nationalist leanings, as was the case with Friedrich "Fritz" Steiner, and Hardenberg doubted whether most of them, given their Slavic features and preference for the Russian language, even had German ancestors. However, they grew increasingly influential and began to compete with the MUSLIM

BROTHERHOOD in the drug trade. When one of the Russian emigrants was slaughtered by multiple stab wounds, a war broke out between them and the *MB*. The *GB* had waited patiently until the two parties had clearly lost ground in numerous fights, attacks, and counterattacks.

There were many transfers of the alleged ringleaders. The reputation of the GERMANIC BROTHERHOOD as a constant grew among the inmates and the officials who had not yet been drawn into the violence. But the restraint was necessarily only temporary.

"Boss, may I speak to you?"

"Sure, Friedrich, come in!"

Hardenberg was sitting in the prisoner representatives' room, preparing for the final conference with the prison administration before the new elections. Initially, following the transfer of Lars Geithe and the death of Rudi Winckler, the plan was to schedule a new election, but Hardenberg was able to prevent this. Surprisingly, he was supported by the two members of the *MB* who had also served on the inmate representatives' council for the past two years. Both of them liked and respected Hardenberg, and they were sincerely committed to the concerns of all prisoners. Speaker Hardenberg was currently having a consultation hour for prisoners in need of assistance with one of them.

"Ahmed, please leave Steiner and me alone—and no one comes in until we're finished."

"Okay! Just call me if you want me to come back in."

"Thanks!"

Ahmed closed the door behind him.

"You're pretty nice to that frail Kanake."

"He's a bright guy and extremely friendly. He treats me with respect, and I treat him with respect. Remember one thing, Fritz: Not all guest workers or foreigners are Kanaks. Patriotism must not be a synonym for simple-minded xenophobia—even if that at times is very difficult!"

"Xeno what?"

"Well, hostile behavior towards foreigners—based on fear ..." Hardenberg explained to his comrade with an encouraging smile.

"I didn't mean to offend anyone, but he's with the *MB*."

"Certainly, but only because otherwise he wouldn't survive in his own circles. There's more to him than meets the eye."

"Not that you'll be switching to *MB* soon ..."

"Well, I guess it won't come to that, you joker," said Hardenberg, laughing heartily. "So, Friedrich, sit down! What's up?" Steiner got straight to the point, because he knew that the boss hated long-winded explanations, and if he called him "Friedrich," it became official.

"My fellow *countrymen* have approached me. They want to put an end to the MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD sooner rather than later and are asking if we might support them."

"What do you think, Friedrich?"

"I am devoted to the *GB*, and I will only do what is best for us. I rely entirely on your decision."

"That's what I wanted to hear. Who's their boss?"

"Boris. You know him."

"Yes, a real vicious fighter. Wasn't it Boris's cousin who was stabbed to death?"

"Exactly."

"The answer is: No! We won't support them at the moment; at least not now. The time isn't right yet, because this imam has to go first. I could take him down today, but then they'd make him a martyr, and then they could become unpredictable. I have to come up with something else, and I already have an idea."

"*That* is what you want me to tell Boris?"

"No! Tell him that I'm ordering a truce from now on, and I'll recommend the same to the *MB*. We can expand our contacts, and when the time comes, we'll go against the *MB* together and avenge his cousin. Can you convince him of that?"

"I think so, because he seems to listen to me."

"Then let's go, my brother, a new game can begin."

The situation did calm down suddenly, and a few days later, the new *MB* guru requested a meeting with Hardenberg. This was to take place during the yard exercise on neutral ground. Each member would bring an adjutant, and the other members had to keep a distance of 30 meters.

He saw Sven Hardenberg approaching. The *GB* men were well distributed, the courtyard was strangely quiet today. The *MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD* was also tense and prepared. The *MB* leader had to admit to himself that this crusader seemed extremely impressive to him. If times were different, they might perhaps be friends, but he was an unbeliever—one he would not underestimate. Germany was liberal and open, indeed, almost suicidally open toward foreigners—he had already learned this during his chemistry studies at a German university. The unbelievers put up with everything, and the scientist, who specialized in explosives, still did not understand why they interpreted this weakness as a strength. He rose from the wooden bench to respectfully greet his German interlocutor:

"Thank you for your willingness to speak," said the *MB* leader, "what may I call you?"

"Sven will do, and your name is?"

"I'd be happy to tell you, but you probably wouldn't be able to pronounce my name. Please call me *Imam* for simplicity's sake." The linguist appeared educated and gentle—but his eyes flashed with the fanaticism of a religious zealot. Everything about this man seemed repellent, so repulsively strange, and a moderate-minded person might consider him hateful. But Hardenberg knew that he certainly had the same effect on his opponent—and not only on him ...

"You asked to speak, and I agreed. Please get to the point!" said Sven Hardenberg, who always preferred verbal simplicity. He was also careful never to use the term "imam" or similar.

"I like that! You know we're having problems with the Russians right now."

"You surely mean the 'Russia Germans'!" Hardenberg corrected him.

"Are they really Germans? They're primitives."

"You should refrain from such allusions. I'm also interested in the intricacies of motivational psychology and won't allow you to drive a wedge between Germans, even if they come from another country. You can play these transparent banterers with your fellow worshippers, but don't try to compete with someone superior. If that was your entire concern, the conversation is over."

"I apologize; I must have underestimated you ..."

"I'm afraid you've overestimated yourself! You shouldn't apply the standard of your narrow insight to me."

"I understand ..."

"But to illustrate the point in conclusion: The *GB* has so far stayed out of your dispute, but should we become even the slightest bit involuntarily involved, then we will take action—and certainly not alongside the *MB*."

"I don't understand that, I know a lot of you *Nazis* ..."

"That means 'National Socialists'—and those haven't existed since 1945, and since the NSDAP is banned, that's probably how it will stay for the time being—but you surely mean nationalists or, better yet, patriots, right? You know, the way you say 'Nazi', I find it offensive. I don't call you 'camel driver, do I ...? "

"Excuse me, please. I mean the fascists ..." Hardenberg groaned in annoyance and rolled his eyes toward heaven in boredom before calmly correcting this obvious mistake::

"Fascists only exist in Italy or Spain ..."

"Okay, okay, I get it. We have good contacts with you *patriots*, because we have common enemies ..."

"I agree with you; I, too, have had some pleasant relationships with people from the Near and Middle East. We certainly have many common adversaries, but we also have opposing attitudes on many, most issues. Our patriotism is based on love of nation,

people, and heritage, not on hatred of alien skin colors, religions, or the like. Yes, we have enemies and we reserve the natural right to fight them fervently if they threaten the sovereignty or freedom of our fatherland, but not because they are different or believe in something else. An alliance, a brotherhood in arms, is possible in certain situations, but Germanic peoples and Muslims will never become true friends. Here in prison, and you know this, a very special situation prevails. For us, blood rules, just as faith rules for you. It has to stay that way in order to maintain the essential balance."

Hardenberg had spoken and was about to get up to leave.

"I have one more request, since you are also a prisoner representative," the would-be imam interjected.

"I'll incline my ear for a moment—but please, without any more beating around the bush."

"I would like to move into the student wing to study."

"I doubt you have the required diploma." Hardenberg, however, was not at all sure.

"I don't want to study at a German university, but rather study and teach the Koran. Like you, I would like to have access to the resources of the library, the computer lab, and the classrooms. I will also be participating in the representative election in a few weeks and hope for your support, as you have a lot of influence."

"Oh, you know, I hardly think you expect me to support you. You're just looking for an excuse to escalate things. So I'll make it easy for you and give you a straightforward answer: You will never be transferred to the student wing. We rule there, and the prison administration will reject this. Study? You can read your Koran in your cell and impart your own interpretations to your disciples—I sincerely respect that—but I will emphatically oppose any other privileges. Election as an inmate representative? Get that out of your head, because the election officer will not be going to allow you to run as a candidate. I think that says it all."

"Yes, I agree! Now we have clear fronts, and I think we both welcome that," the *imam* replied insightfully.

Hardenberg had the last word, unheard by the others, as he walked away, visibly satisfied, with a grin on his face: "Well now! Then let loose the dogs of war!"

In the remaining half hour of the afternoon yard exercise, the entire *GB* gathered in the prisoner representative room, while Fritz, following an instruction from his leader, fetched Boris.

"Boss, Boris and two of his men are here, shall I take them in?" asked Fritz in his carefully chosen High German.

"Yes, Friedrich, thank you," and then to the two youngest members: "Matze, Egmont, secure the door from the outside. Don't let anyone in, and warn us if someone comes."

"*Jawohl!*" The door closed behind them. The Russians waited patiently until they were addressed.

"Boris, my condolences on the death of your cousin."

"Thank you," said the former heavyweight wrestler from Siberia timidly.

"I assume you want retaliation?"

"Yes definitely!"

"Do you know exactly who it was?"

"No, but I don't care! None of them are innocent."

"What do you want from us, Boris?"

"As I already discussed with Friedrich: I politely request the *GB*'s support. But I'll be honest and say that I don't like skinheads that much."

Hardenberg stroked his shaved head and smiled.

"First of all: Despite our hairstyles, we're not skinheads, but patriots. Nevertheless, I know numerous decent, but unfortunately also many antisocial, skinheads. In any case, I'd rather have any shaved-headed beer-drinking proletarian at my side than a pseudo-intellectual, long-haired punk shouting 'Germany

must die!' I hope you can live with that statement. Secondly: Why should we help you?"

"The *GB* is in power, and they're all scared of you. My people and I would be eternally grateful to you personally and to the *GB*, and you would benefit from it."

"We can still discuss what we get out of it, Boris, but I agree to this extent: something has to be done."

Hardenberg now addressed the tense assembly:

"Gentlemen, the *GB* is now ready to restore order in this damned prison. Unfortunately, the peace was short-lived. We are approximately sixty men. The Muslim Brotherhood may outnumber us three to one, but sixty men plus the *Aussiedler* boys are no small feat! You'll probably agree that each of us is worth at least three *MB* washouts, right?" A loud, approving murmur could be heard. Many rapped on the prisoners' representative's meeting table. "Tomorrow, during the yard exercise, we'll make a clean sweep! I expect all the brothers to be at the north wall promptly at quarter past four. Boris, how many men can you get together?"

"Fifteen, maybe twenty."

"Weapons?"

"We are well equipped!"

"I believe you," said Hardenberg, grinning. "Friedrich, what do you think?"

Friedrich Steiner stood up, and as one man each of them followed his example.

"If you say 'Do it!' then it is done!"

A little theatrical, but effective, Hardenberg thought. He wanted to emulate Fritz:

"Damn it, comrades, that's what I wanted to hear. Now, friends, get going and prepare for tomorrow's clash. I wish everyone: good hunting!"

Steiner now shouted loudly:

"Brotherhood!"

And the answer came, as if from one throat:

"In life and in death!"

The following day, Hardenberg looked at his wristwatch, which lay on the table: It was exactly four o'clock in the afternoon. The timepiece would remain in the cell, as it was a precious gift from his father after he received his "sawfish" pinned to his chest with a violent blow at the naval weapons diving school. He still touched the small, almost invisible scars from the two sharp pins of the combat diver or *Kampfschwimmer* badge with pride. He did so now, knowing that if he had endured the hell of the final exercise, swimming 30 km with full equipment in the Baltic Sea, he would also master the current challenge.

Hardenberg knew that his men were already at the exit door, which would now be opened. He couldn't let his presence alert the *MB*, who would surely be wondering why the *GB* and the *Russians* were all assembled. As long as the *GB* leader wasn't there, they would neglect their defensive readiness. Hardenberg resolved to launch the fight immediately upon arrival, before the *MB* had assembled its entire superior mass. Appearance was important—as were all the superficialities behind bars. Every gesture was judged here, and anyone who didn't know the simple rules of the game was quickly lost—so he wanted to be the last one to enter the courtyard, in about twenty minutes. This necessary vanity had nearly cost Hardenberg his life.

"Hardenberg! Stay inside!" Kleinhans threw himself against the massive cell door, and the locking lever crashed down. Hardenberg jumped, but couldn't prevent the process—the blue-painted steel gate was sealed. The hatch opened from the outside. Kleinhans threw in the set of keys.

"Stay inside! I'll give you the keys to keep in case they attack me. Close the hatch from the inside—they have firebombs!" Kleinhans ran away frantically.

Hardenberg knew the situation was serious and did as Kleinhans had ordered. The shouting from the control center of the star-

shaped building grew louder. It sounded like real rage, and he heard his name being called out in defiance. Sirens wailed. Barred gates slammed shut. However, there seemed to be no one outside his cell. He smelled ominous smoke and a hint of tear gas—the tension was unbearable. What had happened? Were his men in danger? A cold draft streamed into the barren room through the open window, along with the sound of numerous sirens.

Hardenberg couldn't stand it and opened the steel hatch. He tried to see something, but it was impossible because the prison control room was too far away. The commotion in the control center hadn't abated. After half an hour, Kleinhans came up the back stairs and stopped in front of Hardenberg's cell.

"Mr. Hardenberg, is everything okay?"

"Yeah, but I'm going crazy! What's happening here?"

"May I have the key ring back?"

"Yes, of course!" Hardenberg handed it through the hatch opening.

"Thank you. There's chaos at headquarters; thank God, all wings are sealed off. The inmates who were still in the building have all been locked in their cells. But maybe I'll start from the beginning."

"I would welcome that, Mr. Kleinhans," said Hardenberg with a hint of a smile, even though he didn't feel like it.

"Shortly before four o'clock, the prison director called me. I was supposed to lock you up immediately, seal the wing, and hide the keys, because they wanted to murder you. I didn't listen any further and ran off, which you probably heard. Afterward, I went to the security officers who had gathered in the administration wing. There, I learned the rest from the director."

Heavy fighting sounds could be heard from the control center. Kleinhans continued:

"The MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD waited until your men were in the courtyard, then forcibly took the keys from an officer and sealed

the door to the outside. A good 150 men then met at the headquarters to wait for you. They were armed with knives and other blunt and stabbing weapons. You would have walked right through there—and would certainly have been slaughtered."

"I have to say, I would never have thought they had that much skill," said Hardenberg, somewhat praising the *MB*.

"You admire these people?"

"No, just their persistence. How are my people?"

"Okay, but they're angry because they realized what was going on. They tried to break down the door from the outside, but they had no chance."

"How could the prison director know that an attack was planned?"

"The *MB*'s plans were betrayed, and for that I am grateful."

"Well, and me most of all! Who was it?"

"No idea."

Hardenberg needed a few breaths to regain his composure: "Mr. Kleinhans, thank you for your swift action ..."

"Don't mention it! You've done a lot for me too ..."

"What happens next?"

"As you can hear, the emergency services are already cleaning up. Riot police and SWAT have been called. When everything is over and the mob is back in the cells or in the infirmary, I'll have to relocate you to the basement. You'll be transferred tomorrow morning."

"What are you saying?"

"Yes, unfortunately."

"And where to?"

"The boss will come down later to talk to you."

Hardenberg knew he couldn't object to this decree. The regulations were precise, and the Ministry of Justice would certainly intervene.

"You could do me a big favor, Mr. Kleinhans."

"Gladly, if it's within my power."

"I need to speak to Friedrich Steiner, because this will probably be my last chance. Do you have any way of getting him from the prison yard?"

"I could get into the yard through the kitchen exit, but what if the others try to come with him? Then there'll be a riot!"

"Tell them it's a personal order from me: only he can come!"

"Okay, I'll try."

Kleinhans made off and actually managed to get Steiner out of the angry crowd and lead him through the kitchen area in the basement into the student wing, even though he risked serious official consequences.

"Can you open the cell so Steiner can come in?"

"That's not possible, because if someone comes and finds him in there, I'll be fired, or worse."

"I understand, it's fine this way. But we need some privacy."

"Naturally ..."

Friedrich Steiner moved closer to the opening in the door. Hardenberg relayed all the information he had from Kleinhans. His deputy was noticeably disturbed and angry.

"We'll take care of these fucking wankers, you can believe me, boss."

"I know that, my friend, but don't risk too much. Basically, I've achieved what I set out to do, even if I have to pay a high price for it. The imam is certainly the mastermind, and that will come out, if it hasn't already. Then he'll be transferred for security reasons, probably to solitary confinement until the new trial for incitement to murder, but at least until deportation to the land of camels. In any case, he'll leave this institution, and with him a few important ringleaders who are currently being beaten up by the cops. Then the *MB* will be leaderless again and barely able to defend itself. You have to strike fast and hard."

"We will!"

"Tomorrow, you'll let Kleinhans list you as a candidate for the prisoners' representative election at the end of the month."

"Clear!"

"The bigger task, however, is another one, Fritz: the *Aussiedler*. If the *MB* is gone, they will take over the drug trade and quickly gain influence. You won't be able to completely prevent that, but you must control it to guarantee the *GB*'s position of power."

Hardenberg and Steiner continued talking for several minutes. A lot had to be packed into a short time. Since Hardenberg had the cell phones and the cash reserves, these were also handed over. At the end of the conversation, he named Steiner the new leader of the prison *GB*—without any weighty ceremony, but with the necessary seriousness.

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The transport department smelled musty, just as Hardenberg remembered it. He hadn't had much time to pack, but Kleinhans would have that done properly once things had calmed down again. He had his small duffel bag with him again, but no idea where his next odyssey would take him. Kleinhans steered Hardenberg past the few closed cells; most seemed unoccupied. The responsible transport officer trotted behind. Kleinhans turned around and whispered briefly with him.

"Mr. Hardenberg, you'll have the cell at the back *right*—a single cell, of course."

"Thank you. Will you sort out my belongings, Mr. Kleinhans?"

"Of course. I'll oversee the packing myself tonight, once everyone's locked away. I'm finishing work soon, but I'll be staying late. My colleagues will most likely be here until late anyway, in case something flares up again."

Hardenberg proceeded to enter the designated cell, which the transport officer had meanwhile unlocked.

"Mr. Hardenberg, I wish you all the best for the future. If Steiner needs support, I will do what I can."

"You know, I never asked for your first name."

"My name is Jürgen."

"And I'm Sven. Thanks for everything, Jürgen Kleinhans!"

They shook hands. On the occasion, Hardenberg handed Kleinhans 200 euros.

"I won't accept that ..."

"It's not for you. Get your children something nice and, as far as is reasonable, remain loyal to the GERMANIC BROTHERHOOD."

On the other side, a small barrage of drum fire sounded from the cell, as an inmate tried to make himself heard by hammering on the door.

"Who's over there?"

"An inmate brought down about ninety minutes ago—just as unexpectedly as you. They only said they were in *strict* protective custody," said the transport officer.

Hardenberg and Kleinhans looked at each other in surprise. It could only be the prisoner who told the prison director about the MB's assassination plans.

"May I speak to him?"

"I can open the door hatch, but nothing more."

The guard in charge of the transport department opened the hatch and stepped back. Hardenberg saw a face appear in the opening with a smile: It was Ahmed, who was also a member of the inmate representation and with whom Hardenberg had maintained a good working relationship.

"Hello Sven, I'm very glad you're well. Hello, Mr. Kleinhans."

Kleinhans nodded friendly to both of them and looked at Hardenberg one last time—everything had been said between them. Before leaving, Jürgen Kleinhans gestured to his colleague to leave the two of them alone for a moment.

"Ahmed, was that you?" Hardenberg asked, as if struck by lightning.

"I couldn't let those fanatics stab you to death. You've always treated me fairly. You're not just a laid-back guy, whom I like, but also an honest man. I know your opinion, and I know that you

don't want us foreigners in your country, but nevertheless, you have always treated those with respect who treated you with respect. I've never considered you a racist, as others say, but rather an idealist who is feared and hated by others, and thus, as happens all over the world, defamed and prejudged." Ahmed looked at Hardenberg with sincerity; he wanted his counterpart to recognize and understand the truth.

Hardenberg could hardly believe what he was hearing and was sorry that he had not taken a closer look at this intelligent and noble young man.

"I can hardly tell you how grateful I am. Your words also surprised and moved me. What will become of you now?"

"Well, my prison sentence ends in two weeks, and I'll certainly be deported ..."

"I can prevent that because I owe you something! I have attorneys who can assist you with your application for permanent residency."

"Thank you, but you don't understand: I want to go home! That's where I belong. I studied in Germany for two and a half years and enjoyed my time, but I also betrayed the kindness and generosity of the Germans by becoming a criminal. I thought I could make a quick buck with drugs and forfeited my right to stay here. I left Tehran back then because the conditions at the university were unbearable. I come from a liberal family, and the religious zealots make life difficult for everyone in my homeland, but I'm also a patriot, and now it's time—I'm 30, after all—to share the responsibility for my life and my country."

"Yes indeed, Ahmed, now I understand you—better than you realize. Please wait a moment." Hardenberg fished a pen and notepad out of his pocket. "I'll write down my lawyer's address for you; he'll always know where I am. Please contact him if you need anything. No matter what, I'm at your disposal, because I owe you my life—and I consider that a debt!"

The transport officer arrived with quick steps and wanted to lock the hatch:

"The director is on his way!"

Hardenberg shook hands with the generous man from the Middle East and said goodbye:

"All the best in Tehran—my *friend* ..."

"Thank you, Sven, I gladly accept your friendship! Perhaps a bit of well-intentioned advice before I leave. Your incomparable Friedrich Nietzsche said: 'He who fights with monsters might beware lest he thereby becomes a monster himself. For when you gaze long into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you.' So please be careful, Sven, you must not completely consume yourself with your service to the fatherland ...!" said Ahmed, waving gallantly one last time before the heavy hatch slammed shut.

Hardenberg was now also locked up. He sat down on the bed and took his first deep breath in almost two hours. He felt his strength leave him and a brief, slight tremor set in. Hardenberg felt years older and already knew that these experiences would leave their mark, which would not disappear even after his release. But that was life. Most people died not because of health reasons, but because the scars on their souls and the burdens on their hearts simply became too many. When the intended inner measuring glass of the capacity for suffering was full, the thread of life simply reached its end.

It took longer than expected, and by the time the door of the transport cell was opened, Hardenberg had long since recovered.

"How are you, Mr. Hardenberg?"

"I'm feeling better now. Let's sit down."

The prison director, his deputy, and the head of security officers sat at the table with six chairs in the middle of the room. Two armed officers remained standing at the door.

"Mr. Hardenberg, you must have heard what was going on. The assassination attempt was very well planned, and we can only be grateful that it was prevented in time."

"Oh yes, I agree ... I admire your immediate action. How are your officers who were holed up at headquarters?"

"You're well informed. Several officers were injured, one seriously, but we now have complete control. The perpetrators will be severely punished, and I will do everything in my power to ensure this!" said the prison director, clearly bitter.

"What do you want to do with me now?"

"I've just made several phone calls, which is why it took so long. Hardly any institution wants you, but you're no longer safe here. In the end, I received two offers: either a security transfer to Stuttgart-Stammheim or regular detention in the high-security prison in Berlin ..."

The decision was easy for Hardenberg: Berlin—the metropolis of his political past and perhaps his future. The BFP, the LEAGUE OF FREE PATRIOTS, had its headquarters there, and Dagmar von Hagen also lived there—and there he would serve the remainder of his time in prison for his ideological convictions with the same dignity and equanimity.

After Sven Hardenberg's transfer, the newly elected prisoner spokesman, Steiner, cleaned up the prison with the help of the *Russians*. Without their leader, the MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD was no match for the rigorous actions of the new alliance.

The general situation hadn't changed, except that now the *Russians* controlled the dirty but unavoidable drug trade. They had to hand over a portion of the profits to the *GB*, which the leader of the powerful brotherhood had to demand for calculating reasons in order to maintain order and limit the financial dominance of the new "dealers." Violence, even the subtle kind, was the order of the day—someone who didn't conform would

perish one way or another. The moral ideas of the "outside" had to be surrendered at the main gate—anyone who couldn't or wouldn't do this was henceforth at the mercy of the true rulers behind bars.

The new *GB* leader thus succeeded in cementing the GERMANIC BROTHERHOOD's sole claim to leadership by any means necessary. Today's devotee could already be tomorrow's rival—those who didn't keep their knife sharp and available were doomed. Friedrich "Fritz" Steiner was up to the task; he had had the best teacher anyone could wish for. Sven Hardenberg was his role model, his mentor, and his friend—he never wanted to disappoint him or his brothers ... in his life before his conviction and imprisonment, he had already disappointed too many.

***“Better dreamlike visions in darkness
than the bright, harsh reality!”***

Deadly Awakening

Dagmar von Hagen was in Hamburg on business in mid-May and, as always on such occasions, was invited by Sven Hardenberg's parents to stay overnight with them in their white villa on the *wet*, the waterfront side of the Elbchaussee—the Hardenbergs wouldn't have accepted a "no" either. Her relationship with Erich and Viktoria Hardenberg had become familiar and familiar. Dagmar von Hagen would have liked to introduce Sven's parents to her family, but preferred to wait until her lover was free. Her mother, the daughter of a Nordic diplomat in Germany, and her stepfather had raised her with care.

Her biological father, a police officer, was killed in the line of duty when she was very young. She had no photographs of him; she only knew his story and bore his name, which her mother, despite remarrying, had never given up. Her parents were strongly influenced by the '68 generation and spoke incessantly of "responsibility for history" and "tolerance," but never toward people who represented a different worldview. She had often experienced this phenomenon in their parents' intellectual circles. Of course, they knew about Sven, but not that he was in prison and certainly not the reason for it. After his release, they would get to know him, and if they didn't accept him wholeheartedly, they could, no, they would lose their daughter.

Dagmar von Hagen entered the dining room shortly before eleven o'clock and was once again struck by the stately and unobstructed view of the picturesque Elbe River. The cook had just laid out the lavish brunch table: one of the few American creations that the proud, patriotic entrepreneur Erich Hardenberg permitted in his house. He got up to serve himself, as was

tradition in the Hardenberg household—although only on Sundays, since the rest of the staff had the day off.

"Good morning, Dagmar, did you sleep well?"

"Wonderful! And you, Sir?"

"Likewise, but you know we're on first name terms."

"Sorry, Erich, but I was completely lost in thought. When I stay in Sven's room, I'm always completely over the moon," the guest enthused.

"Honey, just wait until Sven's back, then you'll be sweeping down the stairs," said Erich Hardenberg with a boyish grin on his face. The tall, gaunt man of the house, with his thick head of hair, shed all the stiffness of business life on the weekends. The spring was very warm, and he wore comfortable clothes: Bermuda shorts, a polo shirt, and canvas shoes.

"Erich Hardenberg! Shame on you, you're impossible again," joked his wife, who now also entered the room. Like her future daughter-in-law, she wore a flowing silk dressing gown, thus emphasizing the familiar atmosphere that was customary in this household. Dagmar von Hagen was always impressed by her elegant appearance with her fine, noble features. Both Hardenbergs would have been judged to be considerably younger.

"Good morning, Viktoria!"

"Good morning, my dear, don't listen to the old man, he's just proud of his son and idealizes him a little, but I'm no exception," said Viktoria Hardenberg, giving Dagmar von Hagen a loving hug.

"I can only understand your husband—I find Sven adorable too."

"Now, ladies, before we begin the homage on this beautiful Sunday, I would like some breakfast, or perhaps lunch? Please sit down and let me serve you."

"Miracles still happen. We've been married for almost forty-three years, and you've never filled my plate, even though I had everything else I could have ever wanted." And to the welcome guest: "Dagmar, you're a good influence on my husband, and I hope, no, I believe, that you'll be a good influence on Sven as well."

He needs you, and you have to be there for him when we're no longer ..."

Viktorija Hardenberg wiped away a tear. Sven had remained her only child, as after his difficult birth, it was determined that she could have no further children. She would have liked to have many children, but had never let Sven know this—in fact, she practically idolized him.

"I will certainly be there for him, together with you." Dagmar also fought back tears.

Erich Hardenberg brought the plates with the haphazardly assorted dishes and placed them on the long dining table. He placed both hands on the women's shoulders.

"Yes, we'll all be there for him! Only four more months!"

"Exactly one hundred and thirteen days and, roughly speaking, eight minutes—including today," Dagmar von Hagen clarified, looking longingly.

"When was the last time you spoke to him?" asked Erich Hardenberg.

"Yesterday. We spoke briefly on the phone, but of course we write each other daily."

"And how do you assess his condition?"

"He's holding up well—after all, he's been in Berlin for over a year—but I'm increasingly seeing bitterness. It's high time he got out of there."

Erich Hardenberg reached into his back pocket and presented his wallet. From it, he removed a scrap of paper.

"A good three years ago, Sven sent me this poem by a certain Alexander Hoyer. He thought it best described his mood. Whenever I'm in danger of forgetting what my suffering son is going through, I pull it out. May I read it to you, Dagmar?"

"Of course, Erich, I beg you," she said imploringly.

"Homeland, you carried my little feet,
as I took my first step,
laughed under my mother's kisses,
and you yourself laughed along.

Homeland, homeland! See me today!
You can no longer ease the pain,
for you yourself are the prey of plunder,
Homeland, homeland, you my heart!"

Erich Hardenberg carefully folded the paper again and reverently put it back in his purse. The lines had touched everyone deeply. The grief seemed unbearable, but Dagmar von Hagen, after wiping away a quiet tear unseen, found the appropriate response:

"One hundred and thirteen days and now not even five minutes left—then he'll be with us ..."

They dined in pleasant peace. No one felt compelled to engage in conversation; they silently enjoyed each other's company. Erich Hardenberg stood up to fetch the remote control for the stereo from the sideboard. He pressed a button, and the classical tones of the incomparable German composer Mozart became quieter, but no less moving. He took a long, dark cigar from the humidor, smelled it with relish, and dutifully put it back: his doctor only allowed him one a week, which he wanted to save for the evening.

"Dagmar, friends are coming over for dinner tonight. I hope you will join our little *soirée*?"

"With pleasure. Will I also meet other family members?"

"No! *We* are the family. Sven does have great-aunts, great-uncles, and other relatives, but they have all turned their backs on him. It was supposedly about 'social standing.' We no longer have anything to do with that cowardly pack. Some even worked for me, but I fired them. Anyone who disrespects my son can go

to hell! Forgive me for being offensive, but the thought of those filthy characters ..."

Erich Hardenberg looked at his wife, who was once again close to tears, but looked up proudly and determinedly.

"I understand both of you, Erich, and I admire your unwavering stance—mine will be no less resolute," Dagmar von Hagen said calmly and firmly. She placed her hand soothingly on the forearm of the agitated host.

"So who's invited?" she asked cheerfully, trying to distract them from their worries.

"Some business associates. A few *North Germanics* from Scandinavia, their wives, and Dr. Klaus Riedel, my friend and lawyer, with his delightful wife, Margarete. It's about the purchase of a small shipyard. I've actually already bought it, but a lot still needs to be done and considered. I want Sven's future, and hopefully yours too, Dagmar, to be secure."

"That was a broad hint, my dear Erich. Don't scare Dagmar; young people will decide for themselves what their future will be," his wife admonished him.

Of course, darling, but you know how much I'd love to have a grandchild. I'll be seventy in a few months, and I'm actually already retired—I don't have much time left. Dagmar is young and healthy, in her prime, and we love her ..."

"Young? I'm slowly but surely approaching my mid-thirties, but I can promise you this much: If Sven wants me, I will happily be the mother of his, our children, and that is so much more than anything else I could have ever wished for in my life!" she said sincerely and unwaveringly, looking openly and cheerfully into the eyes of these two people she had grown so fond of.

Erich Hardenberg beamed with joy and bliss, while his wife spontaneously rose, rushed to her future daughter-in-law, and embraced her warmly. Only with this heartfelt gesture was she able to express the joy she felt deep in her heart that her beloved

son was allowed to experience such a miracle, knowing that a woman like Dagmar von Hagen would be at his side in the future.

"What was that I heard about 'children'? It's about time. I thought our legacy was dying out ..."

"What are you mumbling about, Mother? We thought you were still asleep," said Erich Hardenberg warmly.

The very old lady, in modest Sunday clothes, had a sense of when to enter a room. She went to the youngest and stroked her beautiful, straight blonde hair. Dagmar von Hagen liked the eccentric old lady, who, despite her ninety years, was a model of resolute living. Her blue eyes sparkled, and she returned the smile from her wrinkled face from the bottom of her heart, savoring this penetrating touch. It felt so right to be with these people, to talk with them, to laugh, to live—had she ever felt this in her own family?

"Dagmar will make Sven happy, and if the children turn out to be as beautiful as she is, then we old folks can safely retire. Just look at her: She comes from a good German family—that's obvious!" said the actual lady of the house. "If Sven doesn't cherish this woman, I'll give him a piece of my mind." She beamed as she spoke of her beloved grandson.

"Oh, Mother, I just love how you reduce a complex topic to a simple denominator," said Viktoria Hardenberg and kissed her revered mother on the cheek.

"I'm all for clear words, Mine," Dagmar von Hagen cheerfully chimed in. Sven's grandmother thanked her with a wink—she liked being called shortened "Mine" or "Minchen" at times.

"Clear words ... yes, me too ..." Erich Hardenberg agreed, nodding his head.

"Mother, should I bring you breakfast in your room?"

"Why, Viktoria, don't you all want me here?" she asked playfully defiant.

"Don't joke, dearest *Mommy!*" Viktoria Hardenberg teased her bold mother, who detested these and similar nicknames of the proletariat.

"I'm hungry, children, and I want something to eat. Magda should make me something. But I've already had breakfast, at six in the morning, as befits an old Prussian woman."

"Magda has already left. You know very well that she's free on Sundays after breakfast."

"Yes, yes, the staff has more free time than working hours. It used to be different, dear Viki, completely different ...!"

"Surely, Mother, everything used to be different ..."
Everyone in the room laughed.

Wilhelmine von Tonningen sat down on her comfortable chair at the end of the long table, opposite her son-in-law. Dagmar approached the table and lovingly placed a plate of light delicacies for the matriarchal lady.

"Thank you, my dear, you made an excellent selection," she said and began to dine.

"Dagmar, would you like to help me in the kitchen and put together the final details for tonight's menu? I have to notify the delicatessen's delivery service, which regularly caters to our celebrations, by one o'clock."

"Of course, Viktoria."

"Dearest, just a quick word about tomorrow. We want to fly at noon at the latest to avoid commuter air traffic. We'll land in Berlin-Tempelhof, take our luggage to the Hotel Adlon, and freshen up. The visit is at 3:30, and I'd like to be at the institution half an hour early so I don't miss a minute with Sven."

"Believe me, neither do I, Erich. I have an appointment at the GRUBEN VERLAG at nine o'clock, and I don't think it will take long. If you give me a car, I'll drive straight to the airport afterward," said Dagmar von Hagen.

"Of course, choose one. The keys are on the board in the kitchen. What do you want at the prestigious publishing house? They don't need publicists; they publish nonfiction and novels."

"I didn't want to tell you yet, but I don't think Sven will be mad at me. I haven't worked for the press for a while now. I'm no longer participating in this game of lies and deceit; I want to devote my energies to a higher goal with Sven. We're writing our first book together: a crime novel. He'll provide the ideas, and I'll provide the design. I'd like to submit the first chapters to the publisher. The chief editor, Ulla Kopp, is a former fellow student." Sven Hardenberg's parents were visibly impressed and felt once again that the bond between the two was very strong, very solid.

The social evening with its illustrious guests was cheerful and joyful. Instead of just a few clients and business associates, half the town seemed to have come. The stately villa was full and the atmosphere exuberant. Erich Hardenberg stayed mostly in his study and, together with his lawyer, received various potential investors. The formalities Dagmar von Hagen feared did not occur; the evening was completely informal and non-committal. She had often attended celebrations hosted by the nouveau riche and was disgusted by the superficial and unnatural refinement. This old family, however, had no need for such arrogant behavior; that would be left to the philistines and materialists, as Sven Hardenberg's grandmother always used to say. Dagmar von Hagen was introduced as a future member of the family, and that was exactly how she felt.

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His mobile phone connection was good when Dagmar von Hagen's sweet voice rang out.

"Where are you, my dear?" asked Erich Hardenberg.

"That's why I'm calling. The meeting with the publisher took longer than expected. I've already left, but there's been an acci-

dent at the intersection. I can't go forward or back. The police and emergency services have arrived. It seems serious."

"We'll wait for you, of course, Dagmar."

"No, I don't want you to, because I don't know how long I'll be stuck here. You should fly. I can get to the Autobahn faster than the airport anyway, so I'll just drive through. I can change at my parents' house and go straight to the prison."

"Okay, honey, if you think so, then let's do it that way. My girls send their regards."

"Please give them my best regards—I'm really looking forward to seeing all of you later."

"Dagmar, drive carefully, it looks like rain or even a storm this afternoon, at least that's what the weather service is reporting."

"Thank you, but you should also be careful."

"Oh, I'm an old flying acrobat—and a naval man, too. Since we're taking off now, we'll outsmart the weather gods. You haven't even seen my new plane yet; it flies at almost thirteen thousand meters if necessary. Bye, see you soon ..." Erich Hardenberg said cheerfully.

"Bye, Erich, and kisses!"

The lavish Citation CJ1 from CESSNA climbed to 10,000 meters and reached a cruising speed of 600 kilometers per hour; they felt pleasantly close to the sky. The six-seater offered a high level of comfort, enhanced by the captain's chairs upholstered in the finest mid-brown leather. The second and third rows faced each other to allow four passengers to sit comfortably together, and the cherrywood center and side consoles with cup holders and multimedia connections completed the picture.

Erich Hardenberg and his wife had been enthusiastic pilots for many years. Naturally, Mr. Hardenberg took the left control wheel, while his better half acted as co-pilot and had plenty of opportunity to fly herself. Viktoria's mother insisted on flying along to visit her beloved grandson. This was supposed to be a

surprise. Secretly, the old lady hadn't been feeling well lately and feared she wouldn't live to see Sven's release. She hadn't told her daughter or her esteemed son-in-law about her fears, because complaining was not one of her characteristics—nothing of the sort. Since she was sitting alone in the back, she could make herself comfortable and stretched her limbs freely without feeling ashamed. The dry air made her thirsty, not to mention the health aspect. Naturally, the CESSNA was equipped with a small galley.

"Who wants something to drink?" The old lady was uneasy about flying and wanted to be useful.

"Could you pass me a bottle of orange juice, Mother? Erich, darling, would you like some too?"

"Is there any coffee left?" the pilot asked rhetorically.

His mother-in-law slowly walked over to the built-in espresso machine.

"Affirmative!"

Old Hardenberg was surprised by the severity of the storm that was now beginning to set in. It was also getting very dark that early afternoon, but he was an excellent instrument pilot. In about another twenty minutes, the Tempelhof airport lights would be visible. Without warning, the coffee he'd just been handed spilled onto his upper body. He didn't feel the pain, as the CESSNA inevitably plummeted.

"Viki, I can't pull the damn bird up! Pull the steering wheel!"

His wife pulled with all her might, but it was as if the elevators on the tail unit had a life of their own. The illuminated instrument panel and the large radar image in the center also failed, the light that was supposed to indicate the landing gear was extended flashed erratically—a warning signal sounded. The jet's occupants noticed acrid smoke coming from the advanced, highly equipped cockpit.

"My God, Erich, what's going on? This can't be happening."

“Sabotage, sabotage ...!” screamed Erich Hardenberg, as breathing became increasingly difficult.

Viktoría Hardenberg reached back with her left hand, which the brave old lady took. The daughter looked at her mother and realized that she was not afraid of death. Viktoria felt the calm strength pass into her. She looked at her husband, who repeatedly pulled on the control lever but was growing weaker. Viktoria Hardenberg then let go and placed her right hand on his forearm. Despite her tears, she tried to give her husband a smile of confidence, which he gratefully accepted. The engine sputtered dangerously. When the two turbines failed and the thrust ceased, they knew the end was near. The fuselage of the small business jet trembled: the Citation was no glider. The venerable old lady closed her eyes and slumped into the seat behind the pilot, not a single sound of lamentation escaping her lips.

Wilhelmine von Tonningen could no longer hear her son-in-law’s last radio distress call.

“Mayday, Mayday, here is...”

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He had now been in Berlin for over twelve months, and Sven Hardenberg’s experiences in Hamburg allowed him to establish the GERMANIC BROTHERHOOD in a very short time, partly because it had now acquired a mystical reputation among all *convicts* from southern to northern and from western to central Germany. Due to the relocation, his studies were stalled, although Hardenberg was still enrolled—but at the moment, he had other priorities.

Above all, he was buoyed by the fact that he only had four months of his sentence left. The prison administration had already approached Hardenberg to discuss the possibility of an early release, but he declined each time. Such a release would have meant a probationary period of three to five years, and Har-

denberg wanted to avoid that at all costs. He therefore resolved to hold out until the very end.

At 2:45 p.m., the wing officer on duty came to his cell and knocked quietly.

"Mr. Hardenberg, please come with me," the guard said barely audibly.

"What's going on? My visitation isn't due until 3:30."

"The director would like to speak to you. I'm very sorry about everything ..."

"What are you sorry about?"

The officer could not and did not want to keep the terrible news to himself.

"Have you watched TV in the last hour?"

"No, why?"

"Do you get RBB, the regional broadcaster?"

"Yes ..." Hardenberg said with a bad feeling. He searched for the right channel with the remote control. A film with the unforgettable Heinz Erhardt was playing. Hardenberg looked toward the cell entrance, but the officer had discreetly withdrawn. He looked at the teletext and froze. The very first message he read:

"Jet crashes into single-family home
northeast of Potsdam."

There was more information on page 118. It was the private plane of a well-known shipping magnate from Hamburg, and all three passengers were killed. Fortunately, the house was empty.

The blood drained from Hardenberg's face, he felt nauseous. His legs threatened to give way, and he slumped backward onto the bed like a felled tree. All three of them were dead. He had spoken to his parents on the phone that morning. Dagmar von Hagen had wanted to fly with them, and now they were all gone. During his long imprisonment, he sought oblivion, and often he was far

away, safe and alone, deeply immersed in his own world, even if his comrades didn't notice. But never in his life had he felt so alone, so abandoned—so naked and helpless in the darkness.

"Mr. Hardenberg?"

The prison director stood at the door; he had brought the doctor with him. The television was still on, and the teletext message could still be read. The remote control lay on the floor in front of him, shattered from its fall. But the inmate heard nothing, simply stared ahead—he was empty, simply empty.

"Mr. Hardenberg? I would like to express my sincere condolences this way. We wish you had heard this in a different way." Hardenberg turned his head leisurely, as if in slow motion, and looked at the warden. He spoke slowly, monotonously: "Please, leave me alone. Lock up. Now!"

The prison doctor and the director exchanged glances, but agreed. The doctor placed a small box of herbal tranquilizers on the edge of the sink. As the steel door closed, something in Hardenberg's heart also closed—forever.

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Dagmar von Hagen was on the Autobahn A 24 between Hamburg and Berlin when she heard the news. At first, the information was vague, but then she thought she knew. She called, but Erich Hardenberg's satellite phone was out of range. Instead, she reached her parents, who had also only received initial information about a crash. She then called the shipping company and spoke to the completely stunned executive secretary, Isis Hansen, whom she had met the previous evening at the Hardenbergs'. From her, she received confirmation: The Hardenberg family was dead—the GERMAN FEDERAL BUREAU OF AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION (BFU) had already contacted the company. The A 24 was busy, but she floored the accelerator; the black SLK 500, which she had chosen because of the beautiful weather in

Hamburg, sped purposefully forward. The wind whipped around her ears, and her long blonde hair fluttered like a sail in a raging storm, but she didn't care. Even as she got closer to Berlin and the rain began to fall, she didn't stop to close the roof. She had only one goal: to get to Sven Hardenberg's as quickly as possible.

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Shortly after 4 p.m., the cell door opened again. Hardenberg was still barely able to think rationally. The scene passed before him like a dream. He just wanted to sleep, the last refuge of inner peace he had left. He would have liked to shout at the officer, but was unable and unwilling to move. The guard was visibly excited.

"Mr. Hardenberg, I hate to disturb you, but you have a visitor!"

"My visitors are no more—never again."

"I can only tell you what I was told. A Miss von Hagen has arrived, and I'm to take you to the visitors' department as soon as possible."

A violent adrenaline rush of hope flooded Hardenberg, sending an ice-cold shiver from his head through his entire body to the outermost parts of his hands and feet. His heart skipped a few beats, only to pound all the more violently against his chest. His fingertips tingled incessantly, becoming heavy and warm with force before a thin film of sweat settled over his palms. Countless thoughts flashed through his brain: How could this be? She's dead after all? Wasn't it his father's plane after all? The veil of unbearable grief fell away from him in an instant. He leaped up and ran out of the cell, which the officer was still trying to lock. He had no chance, because the giant ran as fast as possible toward the control room, relentlessly dragging the *key holder* after him, who didn't dare protest. With trembling hands, the young officer unlocked each of the connecting doors until they reached the visitors' section. From a distance he saw the completely distraught Dagmar von Hagen through the glass pane and rushed into the room the two of them had to themselves.

"Dagmar, Dagmar, are you alive?" He held her tightly in his arms—so tightly that he threatened to crush her.

"Yes, oh yes, my love, of course!" she moaned, blinking back the sudden tears. She didn't want to show weakness to him at this moment, because he would need her now, and for that, she had to, wanted to be strong. She pressed herself even closer to him and kissed him passionately again and again.

"I thought you were dead! Where are my parents? You flew together, didn't you?"

"No, darling, no ..." she replied urgently, stroking his cheek soothingly. Her own emotions were largely under control again.

"But I spoke to them on the phone this morning, you wanted to fly together ..." he insisted, distraught.

Dagmar von Hagen could no longer hold back the tears she had initially suppressed; they slowly and silently rolled down her cheeks. Now she understood why he thought she had crashed with his parents.

"I was late and drove here in one of your cars. I heard the notification on the radio and came to you as fast as I could."

Hardenberg could no longer stand on his feet, took a step back, and leaned heavily against the supporting wall. With a broken voice, he persisted:

"But, but ... on television the media reported 'three' dead ..." he could barely pronounce the number.

"My God, Sven, it's so cruel, so tragic ..." Dagmar's hand had found its way back to his cheek, so that her touch gave him support and strength for the following words: "Your grandmother wanted to surprise you and flew along, even though she wasn't feeling well ..."

Now he was finally no longer able to maintain the rest of his composure. For the first time since early childhood, Hardenberg wept uncontrollably, and the two of them, faced with their shared grief, finally merged into an unshakable unity.

Dagmar von Hagen didn't leave until midnight. The officers had never experienced such an extended visit, but the executive assistant prevailed on the prison director and took responsibility. The wing officers had pooled their resources and brought various delicacies to Hardenberg's cell: fruit, cigars, and even his favorite beer, Jever Pilsner, among them. They felt for this unique prisoner, and with some guards, he had developed bonds that went beyond general sympathy. The GERMANIC BROTHERHOOD was shaken, and the members tried to keep any excitement away from their boss. It went so far that the inmate from the laundry room, who, as he did every week, wanted to pick up the bed linen, was beaten out of the wing by a member of the brotherhood for daring to bother Hardenberg with such trivialities.

The very next day, a Tuesday, Dagmar von Hagen was back in Hamburg and settled into the Hardenbergs' house. The staff were dismayed, but the new owner's companion reassured them. She also set about organizing the funeral, which would take place on Friday at 1 p.m. Hardenberg's lawyer, Wolfram Glowania, was instructed to fax a written request to the institution to ensure the attendance of the only surviving relative. The family crypt at the Central Cemetery was prepared. Erich's parents and Viktoria Hardenberg's father were also buried there.

Sven's maternal grandfather was recovering from an injury he had sustained as a fighter pilot on the Eastern Front during the Great War. During the Allied bombing terror in July 1943, Erich's parents and Viktoria's father died in the terrible phosphorus rain of the flare bombs, also known as "Christmas Trees" (*Christbäume*). The two families had never known each other, but their bodies were placed in the same pile on a meadow by the Alster. Erich and Viktoria met as children in the assembly camp for displaced persons in Neumünster. Years later, friendship turned into love, and fate welded them together. Now they would all be reunited in the crypt, and entry into Valhalla was certain.

The prison conference convened to decide whether the request for leave or parole could be granted. Hardenberg was tense and worried, for he would not be able to bear a refusal, and he was certain that the consequences for the decision-makers would be fatal. He would take bitter revenge for the injustice that would have befallen him in that case. The prison director got straight to the point:

"Mr. Hardenberg, the prison conference has now decided that you may attend the funeral of your parents and your grandmother the day after tomorrow. We would have liked to grant you leave, but have decided on an accompanied exit. You will be provided with two officers and a vehicle as your escort. Unfortunately, the law stipulates that you must cover the costs yourself. I would like to express our regret—the prison would have gladly covered this. Finally, once again, our deepest condolences for your great loss."

"I thank you!" Hardenberg said sincerely, even though he felt that the words he received were less sincere.

Sven Hardenberg began to understand what had happened and resolved to pass the upcoming test with dignity. The wing officials allowed him to call Hamburg several times a day so that he could follow the preparations and have a say. On Thursday, he received disturbing news: Dagmar von Hagen had managed to speak with the head of investigators of the BFU. Since she was still accredited as a journalist, she received the appointment she had hoped for. The expert testified that serious inconsistencies had been discovered during the exploration. Traces of a fire, similar to a small explosion, had been found in the luggage compartment and on the left engine, which only experts could detect. The head speculated that few signs of this kind had ever been discovered in crashes, and they always pointed to manipulation or an attack—albeit by talented and experienced professionals in their field. Even more astonishing was the statement that the Federal Prosecutor General had taken over the investigation

without giving any reason and had the aircraft confiscated. The BFU was no longer permitted to conduct the scheduled explosives tests. CESSNA experts, who had traveled from the USA, and the Hardenbergs' family lawyer were also denied the opportunity to inspect the aircraft or review the files, which was in complete contradiction to international and legal practice.

Dagmar von Hagen tried to reach her contacts at the Federal Ministry of the Interior and the Federal Ministry of Transport, but they were no longer available to speak to her. Finally, she managed to locate Hans Rittmeister and finally reached him by phone at his house at Lake Königssee. She believed he still owed her something. She also trusted him in an inexplicable way. He was audibly dismayed and promised to inquire among his former intelligence circles, but was very pessimistic about the chances of success. Rittmeister was of the opinion that if it had been an attack, it would have been carried out by a foreign agency. He wanted to attend the funeral and asked for permission. He hoped to have useful information by then. He also questioned Dagmar von Hagen about Sven Hardenberg. She told him of her love and of the pain and suffering her companion had to endure daily behind bars, of the attempted murder and of her unshakable loyalty to her convictions and faith.

An old wound opened within Rittmeister, and he swore to himself that he would atone for his deep guilt toward the valiant political victim. THE COMING ONES seemed to have plans for Hardenberg, if he had correctly assessed Steinbauer's words years ago in Barcelona, and he welcomed this—but he did not trust the order blindly. The old agent leader feared that the young patriot was merely a means to an end and could be misused for the secret society's purposes. This could only be avoided if Hardenberg obtained information that would make him indispensable and equal to the order. A bold intention developed within Rittmeister that would have incalculable consequences ...

Sven Hardenberg was mentally devastated by the fact that he was locked behind bars, having to endure all the dark tidings without being able to do anything. And as if he didn't have enough to bear, the horrific news kept coming: The family lawyer and asset manager of the deceased shipowner also contacted Dagmar von Hagen—just two days after the crash, the banks canceled the large loan approved for the purchase of the shipyard. The first investors also expressed concerns, but had the decency to wait until after the funeral to call a board meeting. But the climax of the ordeal didn't come until Friday morning, when Sven Hardenberg mentally prepared himself for the most difficult day of his life.

He was already impatient, as he wanted to shower before leaving at 9:00 a.m. At 8:15 a.m., the door to his cell opened. The deputy warden and several correctional officers stood outside. The warden's deputy apologetically held a fax copy in front of him:

"Good morning, Mr. Hardenberg. I know you've been waiting, but something has occurred that we had to discuss first." He cleared his throat and adjusted his glasses with his right index finger. He forced himself to continue speaking, while his counterpart, wide-eyed, braced himself for the worst. "The public prosecutor's office in Berlin has filed an objection to your attendance at your parents' funeral. Only a judge could overturn this objection, but since it's Friday, we won't be able to get one appointed before Monday. We've tried everything, but to no avail. We informed your lawyer by phone a few minutes ago; he's willing to do everything possible, but the prospects are poor. Only the director of the institution could disregard this objection at his own risk—but he's away on a business trip until the middle of next week and unavailable," he said plausibly, knowing full well that his boss was in the office and refused to deliver the terrible news himself. Once again, his deputy had to do the dirty work.

"I'll ask you just once: Who entered the objection?" Hardenberg replied with deadly calm.

"That's not clear from the fax. You can't imagine how sorry I am about all this, Mr. Hardenberg. The photocopy is for you." He handed it to Hardenberg, who glanced over it quickly.

The large eyes that had dominated Hardenberg's face until now narrowed and became small, and the monstrous, discouraging melancholy of the last few days suddenly vanished. He trembled as hatred overcame him and drove away his spiritual anguish. As he addressed the assembly, they sensed the change in mood and recognized his danger:

"I want you to lock my cell—and don't open it again today!"

And so it happened. Hardenberg felt reborn, despite the callousness he had adopted for protection. His twilight sleep was over; now he would act as his beloved parents, but above all his indomitable grandmother, would have expected of him. He no longer exercised caution and retrieved the forbidden, unregistered cell phone that a brother of the Berlin *GB* had smuggled in after an outing. He called Dagmar von Hagen, who comforted him with her unmistakable manner. Her words made him forget the pain he had felt just a short time ago and gave him strength and confidence for his future, for their future together. They talked on the phone until the credit was used up. It was now possible to recharge D1 phone cards at the German Post Office. You needed neither a card nor a device, just the number and the necessary change. His confidante would take care of this when the opportunity arose, as she had done so many times before.

Shortly before 1 p.m., his cell phone vibrated—he could still receive calls on it. It was the woman who now represented his entire family. He was thus able to follow the funeral ceremony and the subsequent requiem from afar. The funeral procession was large. Friends of the Hardenbergs from all over the world attended, as did many members of the BFP and other like-minded

comrades of the only Hardenberg offspring. Dagmar von Hagen had outdone herself in organizing the event, but she still had to do him one last favor—but there was time for that.

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A week and a half after the funeral, Dr. Klaus Riedel came to the prison to clarify the necessary formalities with Sven Hardenberg, who was, of course, designated as the sole heir. Since the visit had been announced, Hardenberg asked his legal friend, Wolfram Glowania, and his confidante to be present.

"Sven ... I hope I can still call you by your first name, my boy. I want to express my sincere condolences again. I miss my good friend, who was your father, and I can only imagine what you're going through. Your parents loved you infinitely!" said Dr. Riedel, squeezeing his hand. "Your father was my last client, and I had you on my lap even as a little boy. I've wanted to retire for a long time, and now I've done that, but I want to see this case through to the end."

"Thank you. Your wonderful letter was a great comfort. You found the right words. My thanks also go to your wife."

Dr. Riedel, deeply moved, sat down, and rummaged awkwardly in his briefcase. Hardenberg's attorney, Glowania, then entered the visiting room.

"Sven, I don't know what to say ..."

"That's not necessary, Wolfram. Thanks for coming on such short notice."

Finally, Dagmar von Hagen arrived. They embraced tightly and passionately; no words were necessary and none were spoken.

After a long pause of silence, Dr. Riedel began the formalities. Sven Hardenberg had to sign several documents, which the loyal lawyer Glowania had previously reviewed pro forma. The most important and pressing issue came last:

"Sven, as I already discussed with Dagmar, the shipyard's situation is devastating. Before we begin, however, I would like to emphasize the dedication and sacrifice with which your—as Erich emphasized to me—future wife overcame the difficulties after this terrible stroke of fate. She was the contact not only for me, but for everyone. The funeral was dignified and did your family complete justice. Without Miss von Hagen, there would be chaos now, and without her, I too would have lost my courage." Dagmar von Hagen felt flattered and blushed. Sven Hardenberg looked at her affectionately and squeezed her hand firmly. Dr. Riedel continued:

"What you will hear today will make you sad, but I want to save your parents' estate somehow, also because Dagmar cares for it with love and prepares it for your return."

Sven Hardenberg squeezed his companion's hand again. He simply had to feel that she was close to him while he received the next terrible news.

"The banks have provisionally called in the loan. I won't go easy on you; you're old enough, Sven. Your father was liable with his entire personal assets, as he rightly believed in the project. His death will most likely mean the death of the shipyard and thus also of the shipping company, not to mention the numerous unemployed. I will try to postpone this as long as possible, perhaps to gain a new opportunity through your release at the beginning of September—but as an experienced corporate lawyer, I doubt this. A trustee was appointed last Monday, but without available financial resources, he will be unable to act. A strike is also not out of the question, although the worker's council has so far been loyal and cooperative. The investors have more or less recalled, and the only way to save the shipping company would be a sale. A board meeting will take place in two weeks, which will decide this issue. I hereby ask colleague Glowania and Miss von Hagen to attend this meeting to represent your interests."

"Will you be there too?"

"You can count on it, Sven. I've already sharpened my claws!"

"Then I thank you for your effort and dedication, but I realize what I am up against and that I'll probably end up alone and penniless. Nevertheless, I won't waver; I'm actually old enough to manage without my parents' wealth. Perhaps this is even the better way ..."

Hardenberg stood up to bid farewell to the lawyers. Dr. Riedel was glum, but also relieved by the confidence with which Sven received the bad news. Wolfram Glowania approached Hardenberg and urged him:

"You are not alone. You have Miss von Hagen, who is not only beautiful and intelligent, but loves you unconditionally. And you have many friends out there, my friend, who share your love for the fatherland and will support you at any time—please don't forget that."

"I won't, at least not again. Thank you, Wolfram. Please send me your bill, and I'll find a way to pay it."

Attorney Glowania shook Hardenberg's hand.

"There will be no bill! You've already paid enough 'In the Name of the People.'"

The two lawyers left the lovers alone so that they could spend the remaining minutes of the visit together.

"Dagmar, can you do me one last favor?"

"Of course. Everything!" she replied without any hesitation, though a little suspicious of the finality of his question.

"Do you still have contacts with the State Ministry of Justice in Berlin?"

"Yes!"

"Please try to find out exactly who was responsible for preventing me from attending my parents' funeral. Here is the fax; you may need the case number. At the back is a list with the names of various prison officers. I also need personal information on them. I'm particularly interested in the address of the prison director. Below you'll find the private phone numbers of various members of the *GB* who are now living at large. If you

need help or manpower for your research, call them—they will obey your every command."

"Of course I will, but what are you planning, Sven?" she asked cautiously.

"You don't want to know. There are some things that are better left unsaid."

"My beloved, I trust that you are doing only what is right."

"Dagmar, please listen to me carefully now: My gratitude for what you have done for me and my family is and always will be infinite. But now the time has come for you to live your own life. Where I am now, there is no room for you. Please leave now and don't come back."

Hardenberg wanted to leave the visiting room. She stood in his way, her eyes blazing, and gave free rein to her anger:

"No, my darling, you won't get rid of me like that!" To emphasize her words, she dug her index finger directly into the center of his broad chest, completely unfazed by his power and strength. "I know you want to protect me and think I'm overwhelmed. Well, I am occasionally, but I'd rather perish than surrender. We belong together. I know that, and you know that. Perhaps your generous chivalry has impressed your other women, but I won't budge an inch. Money isn't the problem; I'm not exactly poor; our book is also being published, which is what I actually wanted to tell you today, but that can't be the answer either. I only want to hear one thing from you that might tempt me to give up on you: Look me in the eyes and tell me honestly that you don't love me anymore. Say it now and don't hesitate!" Her small hand, which had just been resting on his chest, moved to his strong chin, which she now grasped tightly, forcing him to meet her gaze. Hardenberg wanted to avoid the fiery expression in the soft, delicate face, but he couldn't, just as he couldn't tell her he didn't love her.

When it became clear that he would not answer, she nodded firmly and contentedly, after which she said emphatically:

"That's what I thought, Mr. Sven Ansgar Hardenberg ... and I never want to hear anything like that again. I belong to you, with everything I can give—no ifs, ands, or buts!"

Now her voice became softer, but no less urgent and credible:

"Whatever comes, I love you. Are you really listening to me? Whether as a lover or a comrade, if you fall, I will stand for two if necessary!"

She kissed him fleetingly but firmly, turned, and left the room, her mane flying. Her scent still captivated him minutes later.

Only now had he realized he hadn't spoken. So delicate, yet so strong—she needn't worry; she wouldn't hear such nonsense from him again, at least that was what he firmly resolved.

***“You can look into the abyss with courage and pride,
but you don’t have to jump in!”***

The Good Comrade

Since the horrific plane crash, Hans Rittmeister had been in regular telephone conversations with Dagmar von Hagen, who felt increasingly attracted to the distinguished former spy leader. He was genuinely concerned about the fate of the ideological captive. His release was in a few weeks.

Rittmeister had to travel one last time: It was about Sven Hardenberg's future. He had brilliantly survived his ordeal of political imprisonment and more than fulfilled expectations, but the difficult challenges of supposed freedom loomed.

The stay in Zurich at the beginning of August was full of special twists and turns. In the morning, Rittmeister met with his long-time friend, companion, and lawyer, Dr. Helmut Mende, and visited various banks with him to clarify final transactions. These financial institutions were used by the FEDERAL INTELLIGENCE SERVICE (BND) during the Cold War to accumulate liquid funds for special operations—without the risk of having to account for them.

The BND frequently received large sums as thanks for services rendered and information provided. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, this officially ceased due to stricter legislation, which detracted from the intelligence service's operational capacity and effectiveness. However, agent leaders like Rittmeister saw no reason to allow their "emergency funds" to flow back into the Federal Republic of Germany's tax coffers, allowing them to disappear into the all-consuming treasuries of the UN or the EU.

Rittmeister had numerous numbered accounts closed and the money transferred to a single account. The new beneficiary's

identifying features, which the patron recognized from the file—including two prominent scars on his left shoulder and left thigh, caused by gunshot and stab wounds, and numerous tattoos—were noted by a trusted official. A new number was registered and directed to the client in the secure office.

"Mr. Rittmeister, these are considerable sums you are transferring. May I ask if this is of your own free will? Please understand, but I must ask."

"Mr. Bönisch, you can be assured that this step is well considered."

"I can also confirm to you that this process is correct, but above all, justified, Mr. Bönisch," Dr. Mende added formally to his long-time friend.

"I understand, gentlemen, I understand, and you can rest assured that our bank will act to your satisfaction, as it has in the many years of our collaboration," said the old bank director, suppressing the feeling that he had gone too far. His clients valued discretion above all else, even more than anonymity. Dr. Mende, like him, was a member of an exclusive Zurich gentlemen's club, and this kind of business was anything but unusual, even if his instincts told him it did seem a little peculiar.

"Mr. Rittmeister, the safe deposit box you requested is also ready. If you would like to sign the final documents, I will take you to the vault."

"With pleasure. Is it possible for me to leave the key with you?"

"Yes, but uncommon. What instructions do you have regarding the key?"

"Should the beneficiary fail to claim within six months, I request that you close the safe deposit box and irrevocably destroy its contents. What is to be done with the deposit currency and cash is set out in a separate letter to the Board of Directors, which I will also deposit in the safe deposit box."

As guaranteed, everything was done to his satisfaction. Rittmeister was feeling well today and convinced he had made the right decisions.

Dr. Mende invited his long-time client to a well-deserved lunch at the impressive gentlemen's club. They enjoyed an excellent meal and then relished a conversation in the cigar room.

"Hans, how long have we known each other? 20 years?"

"More like 25!"

"Exactly. When I was still a young lawyer, you sought me out, which led to my becoming extremely successful, even if one or two transactions remained opaque to me. I owe you a lot and have always remained loyal to you as a friend, but your transactions of today confuse me, and frankly, I have doubts about whether you really know what you're doing."

"I thank you for your concern, Helmut, but your apprehensions are in vain. You know what a dangerous business I'm in. You also, as one of very few, know my birth name, which alone makes our friendship special. But now I need your unconditional support."

"Of course, Hans! I can sense that something serious is bothering you. What can I do for you?"

"The beneficiary mentioned at the private bank is a man I consider my heir. He is the only one I trust to continue my work of the past few years. He will be given great power, but also great responsibility. This man has proven that he would rather suffer than betray anyone or anything. Therefore, it is of immense importance that you visit him to personally deliver the messages regarding the accounts and the safe deposit box."

Rittmeister reached into the inside pocket of his dark jacket and pulled out an envelope.

"Here you'll find all the necessary information. He will be released on the first Monday in September at 11:30. In the envelope is a plane ticket for you and some cash, which you should please hand over to the gentleman, as he may be penniless for the time being."

Dr. Mende opened the envelope and read the beneficiary's résumé, examined the photograph, and counted the money, which he told Rittmeister to confirm the sum. He resolved to immediately copy everything and keep it in his own safe in case anything unforeseen should happen. Since he had been working for Rittmeister and his kind, he knew and accepted the seriousness and peril of his actions.

"I'll fly on Sunday so I can be at the gate Monday morning. I know from experience that some inmates, out of sheer spite, are released before breakfast. His partner's phone number is also listed here; I'll contact her immediately and coordinate with her."

"Thank you, Helmut. One more piece of important information I only want to give you verbally: If anything happens to Hardenberg, everything will go to his partner. The written authorization is in the safe deposit box."

Now the lawyer was seriously dismayed, but he would not refuse his friend his service.

"If you so order, so it will be done. I read that you are asking Hardenberg to retain me as his attorney. I thank you for that, but your instructions, which I will certainly follow, sound so final," said Dr. Mende elegiacally.

"I'm afraid they are, my friend—irrevocably sealed."

After saying a cordial farewell, Rittmeister felt the urge to take a stroll along the Limmat. The small river, flowing majestically, divided the country's largest city, the economic center of Switzerland.

Zurich—formerly a Germanic settlement, predominantly inhabited by Alemanni, and a Roman conquest territory, and from 1218 onward a German imperial city in the all-powerful Holy Roman Empire—was a bustling but cozy metropolis full of culture, art, and science: a university, music academy, conservatory, observatory, national museum, opera house, zoological and botanical gardens, and much more—a model of cleanliness and order, at least in most parts of the city.

On both sides of the river lay the old town with its numerous narrow, winding streets. Guild houses stood along the "Limmat-quai," most of them, like the tasteful town hall, dating back to the 17th century.

To the right of the river lay the Protestant church Grossmünster with its two Gothic towers, the Wasserkirche (Water Church), and the Haus zum Rüden (House of the Dog). On the opposite bank stood the former Roman-German Imperial Abbey Fraumünster, the guild houses of the Meise and Waag, and St. Peter's Church.

The main shopping street, Bahnhofsstraße, led from the train station through the old town along the left bank of the Limmat to the lake, lined with quays and parks. Rittmeister rested for some time in one of these parks. He enjoyed the good weather and the beautiful nature, observed the cheerful people and the lovers, and lingered in idle thoughts.

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When Hans Rittmeister entered his suite late that evening, tired but carefree, he was surprised to see his old friend Justus Birkle. He had lost weight and his posture seemed weak, but his eyes radiated the familiar strength of a stubborn donkey. They embraced warmly. How he got in was irrelevant.

Although Rittmeister couldn't explain Birkle's presence, he had expected a representative of the order, but he didn't ask any questions. They sat down, poured themselves plenty of brandy, and chatted confidentially. Birkle told Rittmeister his mysterious story.

He had been a full member of the ORDER OF THE COMING ONES for over eleven years, having made his first tentative contacts during his time with the BND. He loved his work, but his country even more. Therefore, he wanted to make his contribution. He could have prevented Sven Hardenberg's arrest, but the order had intervened.

The inner circle of the secret society wanted to put Sven Hardenberg to one last, great test. If he survived his imprisonment physically, but above all psychologically, character-wise, spiritually, and ideologically, he would rise to the leadership ranks. The BFP national association, promoted by the order, would have been only a prelude to greater tasks for Hardenberg.

"You know, my friend, your feelings of guilt are therefore inappropriate," Birkle said to Rittmeister, who was still struggling with himself.

"I understand you, but my doubts remain. The boy—well, he's not a boy anymore—has had to endure a lot. Is this all just a test? You probably know that his parents were killed in an accident."

"Yes, of course! It's terrible, but this could have happened regardless of Hardenberg's imprisonment," said Birkle, who also knew nothing about the true events surrounding the crash.

"The duty to make amends remains nonetheless ..."

"What do you have in mind, Hans?"

"Something that makes the boy unassailable against the state, but also against the order. I fear that his idealism could be misused for their own purposes. This assessment has only been reinforced after your story ..."

"I doubt it, but you're doing what's right—I'm convinced of it."

"I already have, that's why I'm in Zurich. Justus, I have one further question, if you don't mind answering it: Did Hardenberg know we were planning to storm the apartment?"

"Yes, he was warned."

"By whom?"

"That's irrelevant since it was done on my behalf."

"That explains a lot. My respect for him increases even further. He knew, but he stayed and faced responsibility."

"Exactly, Hans, that was also the uncertainty factor, but he had to be warned, because otherwise he would have definitely resisted, which would certainly have meant his death. Then everything would have been in vain."

"And who did he get the secret protocols from?"

"I can't tell you that either," Birkle said with a mischievous grin, "but just this much: The call and the handover of the files were a family operation."

Rittmeister suddenly understood the allusion and imagined the blonde sisters on a white beach with turquoise-blue seawater. The idea made him happy, and he picked up the telephone to order another bottle of the exquisite brandy and matching cigars from the concierge.

Both then removed their jackets and ties. Rittmeister inquired about the considerably older of the two attractive sisters, Adelheid Freytag, whom he hadn't seen for many years, but whom he had often thought about—more often than he actually wanted to.

Birkle reported to him that she was well and that she was lovingly and selflessly caring for her younger sister Sigrun and her son. The two secret keepers lived safely and under guard in the Canary Islands, on one of the nebulous order's numerous fincas, a Spanish farm estate. Adelheid still had Rittmeister's portrait on her bedside table, which said more than words could.

Birkle hadn't told Rittmeister which island, nor that little Thore-Sven was Hardenberg's son. THE COMING ONES would reveal this to Sven Hardenberg when the time was right and safety was for all guaranteed.

Hans Rittmeister, in turn, told his old friend Justus Birkle about his successful efforts to organize the many disaffected and patriotic officials in the secret services and German authorities. They had now formed a far-reaching, strong community for the good of the fatherland, and after nearly four years of sacrifice, danger, and setbacks, their efforts were beginning to bear fruit.

Birkle was, of course, in the know, as the order had kept him informed. He had had a tape recording made of the Hardenberg trial, so that the secret order had learned that Rittmeister, due to his discontent and his level of knowledge, could be relied upon—Rittmeister could be part of the order's future. Birkle was very proud of his friend, as he had taken the only right path.

THE COMING ONES appreciated the intelligence training, but wanted to take over the leadership of the Rittmeister Group to coordinate their work more efficiently and avert the danger of exposure. The masters of the secret society knew that the special unit once led by Rittmeister was hot on his heels. The hunter had become the hunted. Birkle was deeply worried about his friend, but the former agent handler and officer didn't want protection—the lone, proud wolf he had always been.

Rittmeister knew this too, as he still had sources in the BND and the BfV. Above all, he had known for a few days about a final, major intrigue against Sven Hardenberg—the details were to be communicated to him next week. This was one of the reasons why Rittmeister had made initial financial arrangements that morning to give Sven Hardenberg the best possible head start—

informational provisions would follow, even if the transmission might be difficult.

Despite all his reservations, Rittmeister recognized the necessity of strengthening THE COMING ONES with the complete integration of his group. Only unity could now lead to victory on the home stretch. But he would determine the *how*.

So Birkle and he had remained on this topic. The two friends had had lively conversations for hours, late into the night. It was comforting to them to realize that, in the evening of their lives, the significance of existence was finally revealing itself.

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As Justus Birkle carelessly left the luxury hotel early in the morning, he was followed by a black limousine. The birds were already singing, even though the starless sky was still without light ...

The monstrous Bentley Arnage, bearing the license plates of a foreign embassy, stopped abruptly next to him. The doors of the metallic-colored luxury car were flung open. Birkle was roughly grabbed by four strong hands that shot out of the vehicle with lightning speed.

A tranquilizer shot through his elegant gray jacket into his arm. His kidnapping had been meticulously planned. Unfortunately, the conspiratorial meeting with the former spy and agent-leader, Rittmeister, had not gone unnoticed—the hired assassins absolutely had to know the content of the conversation. They would use every conceivable means, and they had never failed, because every victim talked after a certain amount of time—some even begged to be allowed to speak.

The unscrupulous culprits, however, underestimated the determination of the old, fearless German, who, in the final consciousness of the dawning twilight of his indomitable spirit, bit open the cyanide capsule in his mouth and breathed a last satisfied sigh of one last crowned victorious act of superiority.

Freedom Which I Mean ...

Sven Hardenberg heard familiar footsteps outside his cell door. Were they going to stop? Was the guard coming for him? The keys on his ring rattled, just as Hardenberg had heard them a thousand times before. The bolt was thrown upwards, and the recently well-oiled door opened silently. Standing there, grinning blissfully, was "Fat Willi," as he was almost affectionately called by the inmates.

Wilhelm Graf was a prison officer with heart and soul and wing chief, always friendly and talkative. Despite his 27 years of service and the fact that his profession was despised by the police, hated by the inmates, and ostracized by society, he still sincerely believed in the necessity and rightness of rehabilitation. His weapon was politeness.

Those who respected him were respected in return—no matter the crime. He certainly made distinctions. He also detested child molesters and similar subjects, but he remained stoically polite. Being rude to the lower classes or small-minded was not only for Friedrich Nietzsche a "wisdom for hedgehogs". But this prisoner was something special. Sven Hardenberg was not a criminal to Willi. He shared this opinion with most of the officers.

Hardenberg was not only the head of the GERMANIC BROTHERHOOD, but also an impressive personality. If there were difficulties with prisoners, they first went to Hardenberg, who was usually able to help. The GB had its own methods, but these were always, or at least almost always, appropriate. Its boss never neglected the necessary boundaries between inmates and guards, but was binding when the respective correctional officer deserved it.

Hardenberg rose curiously from his desk. The freshly brewed coffee stood steaming under the bulging bookshelf. Next to an unfinished letter and various worksheets lay the new enrollment application for the distance learning university. Sven Hardenberg wanted to complete his studies after his release—if foresight and time would allow it. It was shortly before eleven o'clock. Hardenberg hadn't expected Fat Willi for another three-quarters of an hour, as he was the only one allowed to shower before lunch. Hygiene and physical discipline were Hardenberg's highest commandments. Even these superficialities made him stand out from the mass of creatures in custody. Hardenberg returned the smile and stood in front of Willi, towering over him by a head.

"Morning, Mr. Graf, have you warmed up my shower yet?"

"Good morning, Mr. Hardenberg. That you're already awake ..." Wing chief Graf smiled generous, "... you academics always lay in bed until noon!" He liked this daredevil Hardenberg. He was an eloquent, agile, and cunning whiz whose disposition displayed the typical characteristics of a born leader: fearlessness, a razor-sharp wit, and disarming charm.

"You know very well, Willi, if you want to be attractive, you have to sleep—even if I got up earlier today. And you don't have to be jealous: most people would like to go on vacation the way you work as a civil servant!"

Wilhelm Graf laughed briefly and was happy in the knowledge that he had the trump card.

"I actually wanted to allow you to shower. After that, I might have released you, so you could have really enjoyed the weekend—but not like *this*, of course!" Graf said, pretending to lock the door again.

Hardenberg immediately sensed the mood swing and knew that there was more behind Graf's satirical words than just the usual cheerfulness.

"I've known you for a while now, Mr. Graf, but you have never made any jokes about prison releases. That would be very unwise for guards, too," Hardenberg said with a serious tone, "since something like that can trigger fatal emotions, though not in me."

"You're right, Mr. Hardenberg, I certainly wouldn't joke about something like that. We wing officers are surprised ourselves—but you're being released today!"

"What do you mean by *today*?"

"Right now. As soon as you've showered, we have to go to the administration office so the release papers can be issued. After that, you have to pack up your belongings, and then you'll go down to the effects and clothing chamber," Fat Willi announced cheerfully and elated.

Hardenberg was briefly speechless and seemed to reflect.

"Have you ever come across a case where an inmate was released completely unexpectedly and earlier than expected?"

Graf sensed Hardenberg's reservations.

"No, Mr. Hardenberg, in my many years as a correctional officer, I have never encountered such a procedure. Whoever initiated this has considerable influence at the Ministry of Justice, which sent the speedy telex."

Hardenberg appeared composed, but inside he was seething. After almost five years, any change or deviation from his daily prison routine is usually unpleasant, or at best, exciting. But the prospect of release, even though he hadn't expected it for another three days, was overwhelming.

Graf watched as Hardenberg leisurely and without shame took off his shorts and tank top, wrapped the bath towel around his athletic hips, and grabbed his toiletry bag to head for the shower.

"Did the mail arrive today?"

"No, it probably won't arrive until this afternoon. I'm sorry, but you can rest assured that we'll send everything to your home address."

"Thank you very much."

"Don't mention it."

As he passed the locked cell door of his *fellow sufferer*, Alexander Herzog, he knocked—once long, three times short for "B" for "Brotherhood." Crusher or *Brecher*, as he was called, was Hardenberg's deputy in the Berlin *GB*. Six years ago, he received a life sentence for two counts of manslaughter. After a night of substantial drinking, he stabbed two dark figures until they stopped moving. The presiding judge admitted that the violent Romanian pickpockets, known to the police, bore some of the blame, but allegedly, there was no longer any question of self-defense. Herzog was accused of xenophobia, even though he had always preached "live and let live." The long-haired, gentle, and cosmopolitan biker preferred to go on tour with his friends on his motorcycle rather than get into fights with others just because they came from other countries. But then, in the context of the general politically correct hysteria, he was labeled a criminal of his own volition simply because he was German and his victims were gypsies. At the appeal hearing, the completely excessive, irrational sentence was overturned and reduced to twelve years.

Hardenberg and the brotherhood had saved his life, because *Brecher* had given up on it. But now life had meaning again—even outside the protective walls of this dream world. What he may have lacked in intelligence, he made up for with unconditional loyalty and fanatical patriotism, which he had first learned from Hardenberg. He was a worthy successor, because behind bars, it was mostly not about profound, fact-based verbal arguments, but rather about brutal reality and the indispensable Darwinian right of the strongest—and the wolf pack was the *GB*.

Hardenberg was the undisputed leader, as the scars of his many adversaries demonstrated. This dominance had to be defended. The *MB*, which by then operated throughout the Federal Republic of Germany's penal institutions, sensed a dawn of hope. They reckoned they had a chance once Hardenberg was released, but they weren't counting on *Brecher*! When the brotherhood and its goals were in danger, Alexander Herzog could be ruthless and an iron-willed crusher.

Hardenberg heard a song by the nationalist RAC rock band LANDSER being turned down.

"*Jawohl?*" came a voice from the cell.

"Alex, I'm going to take a shower. After your door is unlocked, come to my cell in ten minutes."

"Is everything alright, boss?"

"That remains to be seen, brother. See you soon!"

Graf, who was already standing in front of the shower room, now opened the door for Hardenberg.

"Willi, could you get me some boxes to pack things in?"

"Of course, I've already sent Reinhardt to the chamber. He'll bring a few with him. Do you have a lot to carry?"

"No! I'm not taking much with me. But there are some things I don't want to leave behind, especially the countless letters that are important to me. Thank you, Mr. Graf!"

"Not for that ..." Graf brushed away the thanks with a wave of his hand and walked urgently towards the office.

Hardenberg enjoyed the hot shower and tried to control his rising excitement, which he managed once again, summoning all his inner strength. His initial anticipation gave way to concern: How would he get to Hamburg, since no one was at the entrance? Where was Dagmar today? In Hamburg, where she was looking after the Hardenbergs' empty house? How would he transport his belongings? Where could he get some money quickly? And

above all, why was he being released today instead of on Monday, as planned? He had a bad feeling but decided to leave his haunting fate to its own devices.

When he stood in front of his cell again, Herzog was already waiting with a worried look. He pointed to the three large moving boxes on the small, deep bed frame with the official-grey bedspread, which had the weight of a carpet, and immediately asked the burning question:

"Are you being transferred? What happened?"

"Well, my friend, I'm apparently being released early. Fat Willi just passed the word."

You could literally see the crusher's head spinning.

"Hey, boss, something's not right. As if they'd give you even one day ..."

Hardenberg had already made this analysis and agreed with the conclusion:

"You're right, Alex, but I definitely won't defend myself against being released. Now please go to Fat Willi up front and have the cells of all the brothers in the wing unlocked. They should gather here."

Herzog clicked his heels together and set off to carry out the order.

The brotherhood behaved in a military manner. Whether jargon or gestures, everything was predetermined. This demeanor promoted cohesion and presented a unified image, especially to the outside world.

The large Berlin correctional facility housed 1,200 inmates—the majority of them human trash. Many were loners, chose isolation, and were without protection in an emergency.

The Serbs and Russians were strong, but kept to their own ethnic circles. The clearly largest group, as in the Hamburg correctional

facility, was the *MB* with approximately 200 members—most of them, however, lacking enthusiasm, as they were forcibly recruited upon arrival. That was the strength of the *GB*, which consisted not only of Germans. Here, everyone was fully committed, and the admission rules were strict: child molesters, drug addicts, and similar characters had no chance. That's why the Brotherhood, with only 47 men, had managed to seize power. The brothers had to adapt and submit, or they would be expelled and become fair game—certain doom.

"Boss, everyone's here now," Herzog said after ten minutes to Hardenberg, who was now dressed and ready for any escape. "Unfortunately, Fat Willi couldn't bring the comrades in the other three wings over."

"That was to be expected. Thank you, my friend!" Hardenberg said pointedly, looking at his well-disposed comrades in the hallway. They lived in the dark, and he had given them what society denied them: respect, importance, and a little light. He stood in front of the cell door and addressed the assembled, tense brothers:

"Gentlemen, you know that I'm being released on Monday. However, this date has been brought forward for unknown reasons. They seem to want to get rid of me today. We've basically already discussed everything. We've been preparing for this step for four weeks, so a few days don't matter."

Hardenberg nodded briefly to Herzog, who stood on his left side and now also looked at the expectant men.

"My loyal friend and deputy, Alexander Herzog, whom we all call *Brecher* for esteemed reasons, will, as planned, be the new leader. He has my highest respect and my trust." Hardenberg now looked at Herzog and said, "Alexander, who do you choose as your deputy?"

"I choose Bertram. Step forward!"

"Who should manage the cash reserves?"

"I choose Mark. Mark, step forward!"

"Who should manage the library and student materials?"

"I choose Gunni. Our headteacher has done outstanding work to date and will continue to do so in the future. Professor, please step forward!" said Herzog with due respect for the 52-year-old former *Oberlehrer*, Gunther Ochsreiter, who was dismissed from higher education for "incitement" and has since stubbornly and relentlessly fought the authorities and the laws of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Hardenberg approached the newly elected executive members and warmly shook their hands. Then he turned again to Herzog, who would exercise command from now on, even while he was still present:

"Send a few boys in my cell. They should pack up. I'll take all my study materials, the letters, and the many file folders. Bertram is to take my two immersion heaters, my radio, and the television for new comrades who are brought in without anything. Gunni will get my typewriter and will make it available to our students for their homework. Mark should take my books and enter them into the list. I only want to keep 'A Life for Youth' by the BDM Reich Representative Jutta Rüdiger, with her personal dedication. I can buy all the other books new. Since young Max is allowed to use the computer room unsupervised due to his business studies, he is to continue maintaining external contacts via email. He needs the cell phone for the connection, which I will give you right away. The professor and you will maintain and expand the connections to the other prison fraternities. I want you to write to Lars Geithe in Bruchsal today and work closely with him, as he likewise looks after the Hamburg *GB*. I'll also give you our emergency fund, approximately 700 euros. Don't worry, I don't need the filthy lucre; I have enough acquaintances here in Berlin. Dispose of it as you see fit. Keep the security guards warm with small gifts; otherwise the *MB* goons will do it for you."

Hardenberg took a small envelope from under his sports jacket. He handed it to Herzog and concurrently checked whether they were being observed. Graf waved from the wing office further ahead. Hardenberg should get ready to go into the office. Hastily, but no less confidently, he added his final instructions:

"Please divide the coffee mugs, plates, tablecloth, candlestick, digital alarm clock, table lamp, sports clothes, sneakers, coffee, tobacco, and food supplies, and other small items among the comrades according to their rank. ... and take my honey supply, Alexander—make a nice mead out of it. But it's not for sale, it's for yourselves. Drink to my health!"

Herzog nodded eagerly. Mead production was important to the brotherhood. They rejected drugs, but making money was essential. Money was power. Bribery and showing favors were part of everyday life. Anyone who didn't go along was quickly left without protection from above.

Hardenberg knelt and reached into his left sock. His butterfly knife was attached there, which he had occasionally used to enforce certain legitimate demands.

"Well, this belongs to you now," he said, pressing the valuable blade into Herzog's hand. "I have to go now. You'll finish everything here. I'll just take my bag with me. Please label my boxes with my parents' address; as far as I know, the property still belongs to me. I'll have the items sent freight collect, as it's uncertain how I'll get to Hamburg today. If you have any more questions, ask them now, my friend; we might not have time later."

Herzog trembled with excitement and fought back tears:

"I can't think of anything right now, boss, but we've discussed everything. You've been preparing me for this day for almost a year. I swear on our blood, I won't disappoint you!"

Hardenberg gave Alexander Herzog's muscular arm a friendly squeeze and walked past the railing toward the office. He briefly

looked at the net in the gaps, designed to deter suicides. But those seeking suicide found numerous other, more elegant ways, as Hardenberg witnessed more than once behind bars. The thought of Rudi still hurt more than two years later, overshadowed only by the tragedy of his parents, which Hardenberg could barely comprehend.

ooooo

Hardenberg and Graf entered the office in the administration wing. The deputy director and the head of the prison service had gathered. The director apologized. He wanted to avoid a final encounter with Hardenberg, whom he secretly feared. He detested not only Hardenberg's political views, but also the contemptuous superiority the inmate had continually displayed toward him.

Like before in Hamburg, Hardenberg was chairman of the Berlin inmates' representative body and had wrested a number of special rights and privileges from the prison and the responsible Ministry of Justice. The *GB* exercised considerable power, and the prison director occasionally wondered who was really in charge. The deputy prison director, Uwe Reither, and his prison service director, the *Vollzugsdienstleiter* (VDL), thought differently: They had only had the best experiences with Hardenberg. For them, he was not a criminal, but a political prisoner, even if not everyone shared this opinion.

"Mr. Hardenberg, I'm happy for you and wanted to wish you only the very best for your future. Mr. Paulsen has already prepared your release papers. You just have to sign them." The deputy director pointed to the slip of paper lying on the administrative head Paulsen's overflowing desk. Hardenberg read it all cursorily and signed the judge's release order. Paulsen gave Hardenberg a copy and added: "You will receive a ticket for the German Railway, unfortunately only second class. You won't get any money since you haven't worked ..."

"Work? Well, Mr. Paulsen, the state was able to pull me through the dirty puddle of alleged justice 'In the Name of the People,' but I refused to drink from it even though it had the color of cocoa!" Hardenberg said with a wink, echoing a Nietzsche quote. Everyone in the room laughed merrily.

The head of security stepped forward to shake Hardenberg's hand, then Paulsen came and finally the deputy director:

"Once again, Mr. Hardenberg, we sincerely wish you all the best in freedom." The VDL and Paulsen nodded in the affirmative.

"Deputy Director Reither, gentlemen, I frankly wish you the same. I haven't experienced any resocialization or other high-sounding theories, but you have always been just and humane—for that, I thank you no less sincerely. You will have your place in my state," Hardenberg replied with a wink and left the room with Graf in tow.

When Hardenberg stood again in front of the cell that had been his home for the past sixteen months, everything was packed and stowed away—because the cell was supposed to be left in a tidy state. No one had dared to remove anything from the cell while Hardenberg was still in the institution.

Time was running out, because it was almost twelve o'clock. In a quarter of an hour, the midday census was due to begin, and then the many low-wage slaves would arrive from the prison's workplaces to eat lunch in their cells.

The former teacher handed Hardenberg a duffle bag containing his most important documents, his appointment book with its numerous contact addresses, toiletries, and clean underwear. Alexander Herzog and his new deputy each picked up one of the two large, tape-sealed cartons to carry to the basement for the retiring boss.

The remaining members of the brotherhood knew that few words were needed. They lined up in front of Hardenberg's cell. The departing leader approached them one by one and shook their hands in his calm manner.

He stepped back, while guard Willi Graf, a good 40 meters away, signaled again from the office. Hardenberg was to go down to the effects and clothing chamber. There, the fine Metzingen thread from BOSS in which he had been sentenced almost four years ago awaited him. Soon, he would be wearing decent clothes again.

The moment had come, and he didn't want to waste any more of that ticking substance of life called "time."

Hardenberg addressed his brothers' military review one last time. Often in his life, he had to speak to men, imposing his will on them, or motivating them. This wasn't always done selflessly or with fundamental conviction, but in this case, there was no suspicion, for every single word was filled with sublime sincerity.

"Well, comrades, it happened faster than we thought, but we won't let that take away our poise. Together we have learned to bear the inevitable with dignity—even now we remain true to this principle. I expect you to remain loyal to our cause and our fellowship in upright solidarity. The supremacy of the GERMANIC BROTHERHOOD here and in the other institutions must be defended by all means. Either you are a tool of fate, or you become its victim. My best wishes for your well-being are assured. I hereby testify that I intend to serve the community from outside as well, and I hereby assure every comrade of my support after their release. With great determination, we will pursue our path, even if it is marked by hardship and demands the utmost in nobility from us. My brothers, we will do our damned duty and obligation. We will make every conceivable sacrifice demanded of us in any way—*Treue um Treue*, loyalty for loyalty!"

Hardenberg turned around and walked purposefully towards the staircase, where Graf was already waiting impatiently with the large key ring.

When he heard the unanimous clacking of the heels of his loyal men, he shuddered with emotion—a final salute of respect!

***“In the depths of my soul there is a warming
darkness, the completeness of which resembles
an impenetrable incomprehensibility of infinity!”***

Twilight of the Gods

Late summer in the Berchtesgadener Land came to a council-liatory end: the temperature was still surprisingly warm, the fresh mountain air, a harbinger of the approaching autumn, delicious and healing. The waters of Lake Königssee lapped gently against the gentle slope, and the first gray wild geese flew south, or so it seemed—they offered a moving sight. The hiker had no eye for the beauty of nature, even though he pretended to want to immortalize it with his binoculars and digital camera.

The young-looking, blond goliath had an assignment. The grandson of a deceased officer and member of the order obeyed, as he had learned from his master and mentor. At the same time, he had also learned to use his superior intelligence and avoid risks whenever possible. He, like his peers, was too valuable for the future of the cause. It wasn't his first assignment, but it was probably his strangest.

His master and mentor—for even he, as a warrior of the first degree, needed guidance and support from time to time—had simply told him to pick up an envelope in "Glorious Hermann's Land." He had to memorize the route map and the hiding place, which wasn't difficult given his photographic short-term memory. During his hike, as prescribed by the assignment, he was to stay on the circular path and walk to the end. He had to protect the envelope at all costs. He was not allowed to carry weapons on the flight from Madrid to Munich, but unarmed close combat was his specialty.

Rittmeister was familiar to him. He had seen him in Barcelona, but Rittmeister hadn't seen him. In his mid-fifties, athletic, professional, he had once been a high-ranking official in the secret

service or something similar, but now he served the cause of the secret society—like all those who had recognized the truth. Contact was to be avoided. Rittmeister knew about the secret society's activities in Germany, but even he had no idea what power truly lay behind it. The former secret service agent had never met twelve of the thirteen masters of the order, who were spread all over the world, even though they knew him and sincerely respected him. Above all, Rittmeister had no idea that THE COMING ONES were founded over 130 years ago, with only one goal, transcending all politics and contemporary history—a goal so secret that not even the warrior at the leadership level dared to dwell on it in his thoughts.

The hiker had reached the impressive manor house. It was even more impressive than in the photographs. The trail led between the outer wall and the boathouse. The two German Shepherds barked dangerously, but there was no escape for them—which was also better for the guard dogs.

The tall man strolled leisurely on until he spotted the proud, old oak tree at the fork in the road. Here he paused to take a photograph. Then he sat down on the south side under the majestic tree, picked up a water bottle, and began walking. At the same time, his left hand disappeared behind his back, his shirt sleeve slipped up, revealing the lower half of a BLACK SUN tattoo on his forearm. This, along with the signet ring on his right ring finger, were the hallmarks of the warriors.

He felt the small opening beneath a large, protruding root that he had expected to be there. Carefully and without haste, he pulled out the sealed envelope and placed it under his shirt. He pressed the envelope firmly onto the prepared tape on his back. When he set the bottle down and sealed it, the most delicate part of his task was completed.

He stood up leisurely, stroked his angelically long hair, and then stretched his supposedly tired limbs. The backpack now provided additional support, the envelope secure. The giant's tension and alertness were at their peak, something an innocent outsider would never have noticed. He continued along the path of his hike.

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Falcon, the scout, the eyes and brain of the sniper, had been lying motionless in wait for three hours. He was itching all over, and his nose threatened to explode if he didn't finally get to scratch it. Hawk lay a meter and a half away, with the patience of an experienced marksman.

They were 600 meters southwest of the impressive country house. It was difficult to find good cover, as tourists wandered the area all day. They looked out onto the large corner terrace, but their target hadn't appeared yet. It was considered certain, however, that he was at home. The Nordic hulk, on the other hand, hadn't gone unnoticed, but he wasn't assessed as a threat by either the scouts or the command post.

"Wanderer is now moving away!" Falcon reported to Foxhole.

"Was there contact to target person? Over!"

"Negative!"

"Falcon, repeat!"

"Negative! Negative!" repeated Falcon in a monotonous voice.

"Confirmed, over and out!" added Hawk.

The landscape was simply perfect, thought Falcon. They had already spent three days exploring this picture-perfect setting. He had read somewhere that the top Nazi Adolf Hitler had vacationed here. The powerful have always grabbed the biggest and best pieces of the pie. Whether with money or force, it was the same. This was true everywhere in the world. In this respect, it

was truly a One World. Falcon and Hawk were waiting for orders from their clients, who were Germans—like them. They both had at least passports from the Federal Republic of Germany, but were actually Israelis—and for the time being, they felt that way too. After finishing school, Falcon had also completed his military service in Israel: a matter of honor for every decent Jew. Sometimes he wasn't sure whether Hawk was really Jewish too. He came from Belarus and lived in Berlin. His German was merely passable. A strange, taciturn old codger, but a professional who never missed his mark.

Falcon didn't care who the target was or why it was being liquidated. If his superiors ordered him to carry out an order for a German authority, that was fine with him. The Germans had scruples, and they were soft. But now Israel and Germany were friends—they could be of mutual service. The Germans paid well: with money, with weapons, another submarine or a shipload of military equipment. You only had to ask, and the Germans would agree. Sometimes pressure was necessary, but that's how it is in the big world of statecraft. Give and take, and above all, his new Israeli homeland, which he had now accepted, had specialized in taking. This was a legitimate policy—well, at least for sovereign nations.

The Germans were once a great people. Falcon, like all officer candidates in the Promised Land, had studied the German military achievements in the First and Second World Wars. They were, undisputedly and without envy, the best. From the heroic fighter pilots à la Freiherr von Richthofen and Joachim "Star of Africa" Marseille, to the *Geistersegler* or ghost sailors, to the Brandenburg Special Commandos and the Abwehr agents in the style of Robert Leibbrand. The contempt for death and fighting prowess of these noble soldiers is still considered a model for many combat units around the world today, but no one would ever admit that to the Germans. Perhaps the *Teutons* knew it, but

were too straitjacketed to maintain this tradition. Some even suspect that the Germans have to have every major political decision approved in Washington and Tel Aviv. The re-education was a complete success—but not for the *Teutons*. Nevertheless, Falcon was very fond of post-war Germans—especially the women.

He thought of his hometown of Frankfurt am Main, where his foreign residency was located. Three months earlier, he had met a young, petite blonde there. It was at a "meeting of cultures." With his dark-blond hair and green eyes, she thought he was an ordinary German. When Tanja learned that he was Jewish, she gave herself completely to him. It was her personal atonement for all the injustices. He liked her, but it never lasted long. Tanja was simply a *shiksa*. The term came from Yiddish. That's what many of his co-religionists secretly called their non-Jewish girls.

Of course, he would never be allowed to introduce her to his otherwise liberal parents, who now lived in a German-speaking settlement in a suburb of Haifa, because they were extremely conservative in this regard. Tanja was a Christian—and, even more aggravating, she was German. But he didn't consider himself a fundamentalist racist. Whether black or white, Israeli or German, Jewish or Catholic, he would liquidate everyone without a qualm of conscience if his service ordered it.

Falcon also occasionally worked in the USA and thought about John F. Kennedy Jr., whose *flying error* allegedly led to the fatal crash in 1999. Kennedy Jr. had asked too many questions about who really killed his father. He had also asked too many questions about Rabin's real assassins and their motives, and he was in the process of finding out about the FEDERAL RESERVE BANK and its secret, untouchable bosses who control world politics. Falcon, who was also an explosives expert, knew the real facts, just as he knew the truth about Kennedy Sr.'s assassination.

He felt uncomfortable with such sensitive assignments, but kept this, as well as all knowledge of the events, to himself. METSADA, the special operations department of the MOSSAD, tolerated no criticism—and certainly no dissent.

"Falcon, this is the Foxhole, over!"

"Falcon!"

"Specify target position, over!"

"Target stepping on terrace!"

"Falcon, Hawk, confirm readiness, over!"

"Here Falcon, readiness positive, I repeat, positive!"

"Here, Hawk, target acquired, readiness positive!"

"Wait for command, password *green*, over!"

"Understood! Wait for *green* command, over and out!"

The tap-proof and encrypted radio connection in the microwave range served to keep foreign law enforcement agencies out. This highly developed technology, like almost all major achievements of modern times, from automobiles to jet fighters, from color television to the first computer, was a German invention. It was *organized* with the help of intelligence services.

While in the United States, the secret services of NSA and CIA exchanged their information using German microwave technology via rooftop transmitters and receivers, German police officers performed a heroic and thank-less service with outdated analog equipment—always hoping that one of the many dead spots wouldn't cost them their lives.

ooooo

Hans Rittmeister breathed in the wonderfully fresh air and looked across the lake at his beloved mountains. He had been back from Switzerland for a good two weeks now and had retired to his huge country house. The staff had been sent on vacation. He had plenty of supplies. He couldn't tell whether the envelope

had been picked up today. He didn't even want to look at the oak tree, so as not to give away its hiding place. It had been lying there for three days, if it was even still there, but since it was sealed watertight, nothing could happen.

He had called a secure number in Barcelona and asked the venerable old man to pick up the envelope and deliver it to Sven Hardenberg before his release. The German Post Office could not be trusted, as the authorities were capable of intercepting mail at any time—something Rittmeister himself had done often enough during his service.

THE COMING ONES would believe, and Rittmeister deliberately let them believe, that this was the most valuable and complete list of names of his comrades-in-arms from the past four and a half years from all German-speaking countries of Europe, but he had decided otherwise: He would leave this trump card to Sven Hardenberg alone, who would be released in a few days to take up the standard again. Hardenberg would thereby gain authority, even vis-à-vis the power-hungry order, and avoid becoming a plaything of various powers, but instead be able to pursue his own noble goals. He had amply proven with his BFP that he was more than suited to this.

Hans Rittmeister re-entered his wood-paneled study, filled with hunting trophies. He had left the French doors to the terrace open, wanting to enjoy the pleasant warmth of the late afternoon. He sat down at the antique desk from the imperial era and placed his service pistol next to his writing pad. The COHIBA in the large ashtray had already gone out, but he had plenty of fine cigars. He would light a new one and enjoy the unobtrusive scent of the cedar match.

He had written many letters and hoped they would reach their recipients. He wanted to finish his last and most important letter

now. It was intended for his daughter, who had believed him dead all his life—but whom he had loved unceasingly and of whom he was immensely proud. Rittmeister had carefully maintained his cover until the end. An executor would ensure that she received the document, even though he had written it primarily for his own selfish salvation.

When he was finished, he put the old quill aside with a trembling hand, folded the letter, and put it in the envelope. Then he heated the wax to seal the envelope with his family crest. Finally, he took the top two sheets of the writing pad, lit the lighter, and burned them, as he always did out of habit. He didn't want to leave any unnecessary clues—let the forensic investigators make a little effort! Now he lit a new cigar.

This was no time for thrift. He leaned back in the comfortable leather-covered wing chair and looked at the large, still cold fireplace, above whose mantel hung a painting of his father, staring at his son, seemingly admonishing but contented.

The old *Rittmeister*: a colonel in the Wehrmacht and major general in the newly founded Bundeswehr. He died far too early. He had survived all the daring missions and parachutes, the bombing terror over the German Reich, and the murderous Eastern Front, only to be killed years later on the newly paved A8 Autobahn between Stuttgart and Munich by a military truck driven by a drunken US Army GI. The highly decorated paratrooper died in his burning Mercedes—unnoticed by posterity.

Hans Rittmeister had never gotten over growing up without a father. The five-year-old boy with the helpless mother had to replace the patriarch—a task in which he was bound to fail, just as he always failed in romantic relationships with the *weaker sex* later in life.

He averted his painful gaze and looked once more at the panorama of mountains, lakes, and forests. His heart weighed heavy, but he finally felt at peace with himself. Here he was born, and here, on his own land, he wanted to die.

ooooo

Falcon adjusted the high-performance binoculars with ZEISS-JENA optics that were constantly glued to his eyes. His message was brief:

"Falcon to Foxhole! Target burning documents. Suspected evidence, over!"

"Falcon, wait!" The agent did as he was ordered.

"Hawk, here Foxhole. Do you have a clear shot? Over!"

"Positive, Foxhole!"

"Stand by! Over and out!"

ooooo

Rittmeister had already noticed yesterday that he was being observed. It couldn't be much longer. He was ready. He thought again of the envelope under the oak tree. It contained a letter to Sven Hardenberg, whom he would no longer be able to speak to in person.

He prayed fervently that they would be able to get the letter to Hardenberg before his release from prison on Monday, and he hoped the contents were appropriate:

>> *Dear Mr. Hardenberg!*

You may still remember me. I was involved in the intrigues that led to your imprisonment on behalf of the FEDERAL OFFICE FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE CONSTITUTION. I am aware of the guilt I have incurred. That I am infinitely sorry will most likely not interest you. I have mourned the death of your parents, and I know that this blow of fate will be almost impossible to overcome.

You have every reason to hate me and this state. Time is of the essence, so I am coming to the point and hope to be able to pay off at least a fraction of my debt. This letter is delivered to you by friends. The time frame is tight, but I was assured that you would receive my note the weekend before your release.

Mr. Hardenberg, you are in great danger. I have learned that the Israeli MOSSAD intends to liquidate you after your release. You cannot rely on the authorities of the Federal Republic of Germany, who have been ordered to keep a low profile. I, too, am in danger, but that is secondary. I have taken precautions on your behalf and implore you to trust me. I will probably no longer be alive when you receive this letter.

My lawyer, Dr. Helmut Mende, will pick you up on the day of your release along with media representatives. He is in possession of compelling evidence of the criminal activities of various state organs. You have complete control over the information, including the whereabouts of former undercover agent, Thorsten Schwamm, who is now in the Netherlands under the witness protection program.

Take revenge if you have no other choice, or act rationally and long-term and save our fatherland—the decision is entirely yours. In a safe deposit box in the vault of a renowned Swiss bank, you will find numerous documents from the "Rittmeister Group," including a personal cover letter and a detailed list of names intended only for you. This is another reason why I want you to maintain your independence. To do this, you need money, lots of money. I have set aside considerable sums of money, which I have transferred to you. Dr. Mende will let you, and only you, in on the details. You can trust him blindly.

I wish you, and also your faithful companion, whom I hold in high esteem for very personal reasons, all the best in your life. Forget the nightmares of the past, and if you can, please forgive me.

May our Lord protect you and Germany!

Yours, Hans Rittmeister<<

Yes, he had found the right words with the necessary touch of pathos. He couldn't do more. Hardenberg and he had reached a point where they no longer controlled events—events controlled them! The future would show whether his modest legacy had an impact, but despite his great confidence, he would certainly never know.

oooo

The operational command had made a decision:

"Falcon, this is Foxhole! We have the green light from Eagle's Nest. *Green*, Falcon, *green*! Confirm, over!"

"Falcon here! Confirm, we have *green*! Over and out!"

Falcon now looked briefly at Hawk and gave him a thumbs-up, as he had been forced to do many times before. Immediately afterward, he continued observing the target, mentally preparing himself for the crack of the shot that would ring out next to him in a few seconds. His grip on the binoculars tightened, partly due to the inevitable adrenaline rush; his palms became sweaty. He was glad he wasn't the shooter.

Hawk shut off all thoughts. He had had the mark in his scope for hours. He had been trained for years for such moments. His trusty PSG1 rifle lay perfectly still on its front supports. The light was excellent, although there was a slight north wind, but that wasn't a problem at approximately 600 meters, at least not for him. It was all a matter of mathematical calculation and experi-

ence. Since he was higher than the target, he aimed just to the left and slightly above the side of the hairline, so the projectile would likely hit the side of the back of the head. The patio doors were open, so the shooter didn't have to expect any deviations due to physical resistance.

Hawk deliberately blinked again, took a deep breath, and slowly released half of it. He found the pressure point and, despite a small animal moving to his right, pulled through smoothly—the target fell to the ground.

Falcon gave Hawk the hand signal, indicating that the target was still moving. Hawk resumed his aim without overzealousness. The massive desk was still in the way, but he immediately had the target back in sight ...

ooooo

Hans Rittmeister instantly realized what had happened and immediately tried to collect his thoughts. He was about to lose consciousness and didn't understand why he wasn't dead. He managed to grab the wooden leg and pulled himself slightly under the table. His strength now completely failed, and he was unable to move.

As his cognizance faded, he felt only something wet running under the back of his head, yet he felt no pain. Through the terrace railing, he caught a last glimpse of his beloved homeland. The last lines of a poem by a contemporary poet from 1849 came to mind:

*... And even if our eyes are broken in death,
the light of freedom shines on our graves.*

Arnulf von Hagen, as “Hans Rittmeister” was really named, did not hear the echo of the second shot, nor the approach of the bloodthirsty killing squad.

... yet the treacherous bullet of the hired assassins could not stop the righteous German's last tear—it slowly dripped to the floor to join fraternally with the flowing blood.

***“Modesty is the
adornment of the superior!”***

Ride of the Valkyries

The great outer gate to freedom opened slowly, almost too slowly, it seemed, while the inner gate of the prison slammed shut. The last visible rays of sunlight peeped through the clouds and seemed to be pushing into the gap, wanting to support the mechanism with all its might as it opened.

The air had subjectively become warmer—fresher, freer, more pristine. When the gap between the gate and the wall was wide enough, Sven Hardenberg closed the top buttons of his dark gray suit jacket, examined the flawless shine of his black shoes with a worldly look, took the small, bulging bag made of parachute silk containing his belongings, clutched it tightly, and stepped deliberately over the threshold. Nearly five years of deprivation of liberty, of imprisonment were coming to an end.

He stopped abruptly. His breath hitched. He closed his eyes and tilted his well-shaped, shaved head slightly back, taking a deep breath—finally, he was free!

His muscular body threatened to sway from the unexpectedly sudden impressions. He felt as if he were awakening from a long, numb, gloomy sleep of death. It was a rebirth, and today would be the first day of his new, untainted life. What had happened, he knew only too well, but what was to come remained a mystery. He felt no misgivings, no anxiety—only the will to act.

One of the officers cleared his throat:

"Mr. Hardenberg? We just wanted to say ... well, we've started a small collection for you. It's not much, but it's enough for the most urgent needs. You'll also find a small gift in there, since we know you're a big fan of the national team."

Wilhelm Graf looked down, embarrassed, as he held the envelope in front of him. The officials were particularly proud that they had secured two tickets online for the opening match of the 2006 FIFA WORLD CUP at Munich's Olympic Stadium next summer.

"We sincerely hope that you will accept this humble offering."

Hardenberg turned slowly, trying not to show his emotion. He could barely think clearly because of the feeling of freedom. The officers saw his deep blue eyes glow. An aura of energy and command encircled and dominated his surroundings. He confidently extended his hand to the three uniformed guards, and they felt him looking deep into their souls.

"Gentlemen, I accept this act of humanity and mercy with utmost gratitude—I will not forget it."

Hardenberg took the envelope and turned around again.

"What will you do now?" asked the portly guard sensitively.

"I intend to do what I do best."

"So, where are you going, Mr. Hardenberg?" asked Fat Willi, genuinely concerned. "No one came to pick you up. Everyone wasn't expecting you to be released until Monday."

Hardenberg turned his head to the left, everything happened so slowly, every movement, every word seemed like an eternity to him:

"I'm going there. To the grove. Can't you hear the murmuring of the oak trees? Can't you smell the scent of the soil? The forest holds the bones of our ancestors. I must go there first. After so many years ..."

He looked at the officers reassuringly and wiped away their brief astonishment:

"But don't worry, my dear Willi, after that, a opportunity to return home will present itself. Thanks to this envelope, I'm sure I'll find a way. I wanted to give you something, too."

Hardenberg pressed a folded piece of paper into Graf's hand and said almost in a whisper:

"Please don't read this until I'm gone. I'm glad I didn't have to use this data. I should have passed it on to *Brecher*, but I simply couldn't and wouldn't do that."

A rumble of thunder signaled a violent, albeit certainly short, storm—presumably a tribute to the god Donar. Hardenberg turned and looked toward the forest. A smile, invisible to the now silent officials, played across Hardenberg's full lips:

"You've also given me this heroic weather, gentlemen. Today the Iron Crosses are growing ..."

With a proud, dignified step, Sven Hardenberg walked away and refused to look back.

The officials at the gate watched him leave with an inexplicable sense of melancholy. Wilhelm Graf glanced furtively at the piece of paper in his hand. On it—in beautiful, feminine handwriting—was his name and home address, the names, birth dates, and schools of his three children, and a fitting description of his wife. Despite the humidity, Fat Willi felt a chill run down his spine as he crushed the piece of paper in his damp hand and threw it into the trash can in the courtyard.

There was also a notepad. Hardenberg carried it with him like a treasure. On it, in the same handwriting, was the Berlin private address of the senior public prosecutor responsible for not only Hardenberg's unjustified ideological detention, but also the disastrous and momentous objection to the escorted furlough on the occasion of his parents' funeral.

Unnoticed by everyone, a dark delivery van crawled out of a parking space and drove just like the other trucks toward the forest. Hardenberg strolled leisurely past the facades of houses.

He passed a butcher's shop and breathed in the now unfamiliar scent, almost virginally. The overwhelming sensation of liberty threatened to overwhelm him. It all seemed like a long-forgotten dream—and he was afraid of waking up and finding himself in the lifeless darkness of his cell again.

He paused briefly in front of a hair salon window to admire a young customer smiling at him. He could hardly comprehend how such a normal life could exist so few meters from an unreal world behind walls, bars, and barbed wire.

At that moment, he saw the commercial van in the blurred reflection of the tinted window, approaching noticeably slowly. His sharp instincts instantly returned. His inner alarm bells rang incessantly. Sven Hardenberg resumed his pace naturally. He was sure they hadn't yet noticed that he had spotted them.

He assessed his situation: the next intersection was about 30 meters away—if the traffic light turned red, he could take the risk.

Hardenberg hoped the *incantation* would begin soon. He wanted to finally seize the sword of defensiveness; the time for waiting was over.

The side door of the van slid slowly back a few centimeters, a long rifle barrel protruded, shimmering dully in the muted, silver light of the impending skybreak.

The shooter, who had to carry out a delicate mission in southern Bavaria the day before, could not be seen in the darkness of the interior.

Another ten meters ...

Hardenberg's mind raced. Did he have a chance? The shipping company of his father, the GERMANIC BROTHERHOOD, the BFP—everyone relied on him. And what would become of his beloved companion if he didn't make it? Dagmar von Hagen was the only remaining dream that had stood the test of time.

The traffic light turned yellow ...

Hardenberg spotted a small rental truck in the opposite lane, approaching the intersection as if under time pressure and signaling left. Was it just a coincidence? Or were his would-be assassins getting some help?

To his great astonishment, the young-looking driver with the long, light hair, the large ring, and the striking tattoo on his forearm flashed his lights briefly, then, while the traffic light was still red, made a breakneck turn—exactly the same direction Hardenberg wanted to go.

Mitten auf der Kreuzung würgte der Fahrer den LKW ab und blieb unweigerlich stehen. Der Verkehr war von allen Richtungen restlos behindert.

Now!

Now the timing was right—a unique opportunity. The former inmate didn't hesitate for a second and sprinted off in a zigzag pattern, just as he had often been forced to do during military exercises or on deployment.

As Sven Ansgar Hardenberg reached the blocked intersection, he heard the muffled shot. At the same time, he felt the tiny fragments of the struck wall, which, like pinpricks, only lightly penetrated his scalp as he stormed around the corner to the right and escaped the assassination attempt in the onset of torrential rain.

Meanwhile, he could hear the furious roar of an engine, while the blind blare of the vanquished horn resounded—the trumpet call for the *Walkürenritt*, the final ride of the Valkyries...

THE END

Aufstand im Weltenbrand

***"True love is like a savings account:
you have to pay into it for a long time and
consistently before you can live off the interest."***

Phoenix from the Ashes

Sven Hardenberg had not succeeded—this strong and unbreakable patriot had failed: he had not managed to save the shipping company and thus his father's legacy ... but this was now irrelevant, because what he was supposed to achieve was far more important, far more valuable.

Hardenberg reached the woman, the companion, who was waiting for him. She tended his wounds and caressed his spirit. He told her that in the depths of his soul lay a warming darkness, whose completeness resembled an impenetrable incomprehensibility of infinity—and Dagmar von Hagen was the source of light, for she had managed to radiate a promising sunshine into the night shadows of his inner life. The shipping company was lost, but with the funds he would receive from "Rittmeister" Arnulf von Hagen, the father of his companion Dagmar, he was more than financially secure.

Dr. Helmut Mende quickly tracked down Sven in Hamburg. Dagmar rented a suite at the HOTEL ATLANTIC for three months and had the personal belongings from the Hardenbergs' foreclosed villa stored. While reviewing these documents, Sven and Dagmar discovered that Erich Hardenberg had accumulated considerable savings in Liechtenstein. The illicit money had still been discovered. Now Sven also understood the numerical codes intended for him, which were contained in his father's initially opaque will. He was only able to assess his father's true wealth after ascertaining the documents.

Dr. Mende, Rittmeister's lawyer and confidant, was a great help and carried out his task professionally. Dagmar von Hagen, however, would never learn that Hans Rittmeister was her biological

father—she would never receive the sealed letter written on the day of his death. Nevertheless, she and Hardenberg attended the funeral of the old secret service agent, who was said to have committed suicide. Dagmar was contacted and informed by telephone by an associate of the deceased, who introduced herself as Adelheid Freytag—and she felt a bitter, paralyzing pain that she did not understand and had not expected. 'Why?' she asked herself, but without the courage to search for a satisfactory answer. Even more puzzling was the soon-to-be-established fact that she would inherit his Bavarian estate—a reality she had deferred for the time being, one she would never have to deal with concretely.

Sven Hardenberg flew to Switzerland with Helmut Mende and his friend and personal lawyer, Wolfram Glowania. It didn't take long, as the safe contained only the bare essentials, but that was really something. Despite unrestricted control over it, the enormous fortune remained in place for the time being. The recently released prisoner Hardenberg processed the impressions flooding in on him surprisingly fast. Even the brief detour to Liechtenstein was more than profitable, and the treasure hunt was a blessing. He was now extremely wealthy again and possessed unimaginable power, but he wouldn't rush into anything—the time to act had not yet come.

Without his father's shipping company, he was free, and he had no use for the publicity of an entrepreneur anyway—his duties now lay in a shadowy world that had to be hidden. Dagmar von Hagen sensed Sven Hardenberg's restlessness, but also his suffering—the hardships of imprisonment had left a deeper mark on him than he himself wanted to admit.

During the day, they walked hand in hand, dined extensively in various restaurants, sometimes in the suite—if only to avoid an encounter with the hotel's long-term resident, the annoying leftist entertainer Udo Lindenberg, who they found unbearable. The

fire in the fireplace, the delicacies of the gourmet kitchen—they sat naked opposite each other, talking a lot and quickly, and then for a long time without speaking. At night, they made love, often passionately and uninhibitedly, sometimes tenderly and devotedly, with tears in their eyes and a smile on lips chapped from kisses ... Sven Hardenberg took Dagmar von Hagen, who would now also be called Hardenberg, as his wife. It was the end of September—and it was right, so right. A small ceremony at the registry office, no witnesses, just their deep love, their undying fidelity, and their eternal vow.

The Hardenbergs moved to Berlin—to an old-fashioned, yet exquisite and modernized residence at lake Wannsee. After a long time, Sven Hardenberg celebrated his birthday in his own four walls. The magnificent villa was their happiness, but nothing compared to the fact that Dagmar was pregnant and about to give birth to his child. He stroked her belly every day, lovingly rocked her to sleep despite her nausea, massaged her aching feet, and provided her with everything she could wish for—even *Rollmops*, marinated herring, with lemon sorbet at midnight. When she slept, he spent hours watching her in the semidarkness. He still loved holding her face in his hands, because if true beauty could only be *smelled*, then this woman—his wife—was simply breathtaking.

The delivery at the summer solstice the following year went smoothly; the doctors at the CAMPUS VIRCHOW HOSPITAL did a perfect job with the requested cesarean section. The day before, the German team defeated Ecuador 3-0 at the spectacular Football World Cup in Germany, but this international, black-red-and-gold, patriotic, and taboo-breaking sporting event, which attracted worldwide attention, inevitably faded into the background, for a beautiful Germanic princess was born that day. Her name: Viktoria Wilhelmine, in memory of Sven Hardenberg's beloved mother and adored grandmother. Parents and offspring

immediately formed their own impenetrable universe, which was equally perceived and recognized by outsiders.

Children's laughter, outings, evenings of all three cuddling together, the Yuletide season lights and the first snow—oh, how beautiful life could be ... and the happy parents enjoyed it to the fullest. They rediscovered life, and Berlin offered plenty of variety: Sven Hardenberg marveled at the completed central train station, the finished Potsdamer Platz, and the order at the Brandenburg Gate, for the Russian traders and gypsy gangs were gone—not out of Berlin, but at least they had relocated to the outskirts. As Hardenberg walked past the Reichstag building for the first time again, he said to his wife: "A folklore saying goes: only the tough ones make it into the garden! But the traditional, patriotic-infused, flagship lawn of the post-war Federal Republic of Germany is, unfortunately, only sparsely sown." They laughed quietly and conspiratorially, if a little wistfully ... but Sven never forgot that he had a task, a sacred destiny, and so he firmly resolved to throw himself into work after the New Year's celebration.

Over the next two years, Hardenberg streamlined the "Rittmeister Group" and steadily expanded it. It was hard to believe how far-reaching—and powerful—the network of these patriots was. The BUND FREIER PATRIOTEN (LEAGUE OF FREE PATRIOTS) was also on the rise again, but also on everyone's lips. For this reason alone, he only contributed financially and occasionally offered advice to the association. Hardenberg preferred to remain hidden, also so as not to endanger other members and leaders. Nevertheless, the ORDER OF THE COMING ONES approached him at the beginning of this period. He knew the secret society, had long since researched it, and often read the letter Rittmeister sent him, which was delivered to his suite by the concierge of the luxurious hotel on the Alster on the third day of his freedom. He also never neglected the issue of security. Immediately after his release, he

summoned his loyal BFP bodyguards, who further enhanced his safety. He did not know that the order had been providing security in the background from the very beginning, but he nevertheless very well suspected it.

Then the great calamity happened. Little Viktoria Wilhelmine was not even two and a half and a Nordic beauty ... so clever, so sophisticated—and such a joy for her beloved father. His chest always swelled with great pride when the little princess clung to his neck and wanted to be carried around. Today was their fixed "father and daughter day"—they were going to the Tierpark Berlin, one of two zoos and located in Friedrichsfelde, together. Sven Hardenberg took his bodyguards and the two Rottweilers with him. They said a warm, laughing goodbye to their mother. Dagmar wanted to have a bath first; she was feeling a little sick, and full of joyful anticipation, she suspected that she was pregnant again. She had an appointment with her gynecologist, and if Dr. Tatjana König, with whom she had been good friends for a long time, discovered she was pregnant, she wanted to prepare a celebratory dinner for her husband and her parents and share the happy news with the family.

Dagmar Hardenberg, née von Hagen, was never to reach the doctor's office. Her PORSCHE CAYENNE, which bore a strong resemblance to her *lord and commander's*, her husband's new Turbo S, had burst into flames shortly before. The police investigators classified it an accident, but Hardenberg and all those close to him knew better ...

***“Hope is CERTAINTY,
which has just not yet been fulfilled!”***

The Enemy of My Enemy

The funeral was painful. During his imprisonment, Hardenberg had already experienced the grief of Christmas-time. The ashes of his beloved wife's dismembered body were buried on a cool, dim morning next to an old oak tree on the property by the Wannsee. This in Germany illegal procedure was made possible with no small amount of bribes. His bitter, spiritually numbing pain at times seemed unbearable, yet he clutched this chalice of suffering—just as desperately as he embraced the ashes of his honor and his hope.

The villa was better guarded than ever since the tragic visitation. Berlin police blocked the access roads, and members of the Rittmeister Group in plain clothes ensured that the ceremony ran smoothly, despite angry neighbors, residents, and locals who wanted to take a walk along the shore from Heckeshorn toward Pfaueninsel. There were only a few visitors to pay their condolences in the first few days after the burial, but they were all distinguished. A few limousines with diplomatic tags could be spotted—and they were spotted, as certain *services* were also present.

A special figure was also "seen" near the Hardenberg estate in the first week after Dagmar's death, even if he didn't initially get out of the blacked-out AUDI S8. This person was sent from the Iranian capital to contact a "respectable German with excellent connections"—a German he knew, liked, and had often embraced in a brotherly spirit.

Lars Geithe strode confidently toward the study, where his dejected boss lingered, surrounded by leather, dark furniture, precious books, delicately crafted wood paneling, and a hint of ex-

pensive cigar smoke. For a week, emptiness and inactivity had reigned at the master of the house, mourning the death of his adored wife and occasionally wailing hatefully—but only when his beloved daughter was sound asleep and oblivious!

Geithe was Hardenberg's liegeman, and he wanted nothing else. After his release from prison in Bruchsal, he found it difficult to stand on his own two feet, and he no longer wanted to be a burden to his sister—she had graduated with diploma, married, and was now leading her own life. When Hardenberg offered him a position last year, he immediately accepted. He became Hardenberg's right-hand man, his majordomo, and he loved his work. He kept an eye on the house staff, but also on the security measures that were so vital. He watched his boss's back and maintained contact with the members of the GERMANIC BROTHERHOOD "in front of" and "behind bars." The GB was more active and notorious than ever—Friedrich "Fritz" Steiner and Alexander "the Crusher" Herzog had also made a considerable name for themselves outside the prison walls.

Lars Geithe knocked without hesitation on the solid wooden door, which was ajar; the magnificent Black Forest grandfather clock in the hallway had just struck the midnight hour.

"Boss, you have a visitor. The guys at the gate reported that a foreigner really wants to see you—must be a diplomat or something." He handed Hardenberg the business card he'd presented at the gate. On the front, it read: CULTURAL ATTACHÉ ALADAR HADDAD-ADEL, EMBASSY OF ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN. On the back, a handwritten quote read: "He who fights with monsters should be careful not to become a monster himself. And if you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will gaze into you as well."

Hardenberg thought for a moment and seemed to awaken from a stupor. And then, as if struck by a flash of inspiration, he whis-

pered: "Ahmed!" Geithe's boss stood up, adjusted his loosened tie, and leisurely turned to his follower.

"Major, is he alone?"

"Oh well, there are still a few shooting gallery figures in dark suits standing around the two vehicles, but we've already taken aim at them," said Geithe, unconsciously stroking his new P30 on the right hand and knowing that the guards at the gate and the building entrance were professionals in the use of their MP7s.

"Is good. Bring the *cultural attaché* to me, no security check!"

"But boss, that camel driver ..."

Sven smiled briefly: "Attention, Brother Lars, I think you know him, he's a friend—well, at least I hope so."

"Santa Fu? Hamburg"

"Yes, yes, the *good old* Fuhlsbüttel Prison," replied Hardenberg, nodding leisurely.

"I thought so. Okay, I'll bring him in."

The majordomo hurried off, leaving his thoughtful boss behind.

"Mrs. Anders, z. m.!" Hardenberg called the pearl of his household to him with a friendly "to me" using the code (*zu mir!*) he had learned in prison.

"Yes, boss—I'm coming!" called the robust and always cheerful old maid loudly with her inimitable Berlin dialect from the adjoining kitchen. She was currently taking particularly good care of Hardenberg and his daughter, who was being lavishly spoiled by the widowed housekeeper.

"Is my princess sleeping soundly?" Hardenberg asked as the opulent figure entered the room.

"Of course, our little doll sleeps like an angel, right? And I won't allow the little one to be disturbed and suffer even more ... not with me!" The proud housekeeper shed a meek tear. Hardenberg went to the fireplace and added another log.

"Come on, don't be such a pout," Hardenberg scolded tenderly in Berlin dialect, pursing his lips into a kiss, "and bring some coffee and tea—I'm about to have an important guest."

"And at this time of night? That's typical ... I'd be happy to do it. I'll check if there are any rolls left, I can make sandwiches too. Things like this didn't happen back in my day ..." The Hardenbergs' house pearl grinned broadly, lifted the apron of her house-dress, and happily set to work. She was glad she was needed.

The guest entered the room, while Lars Geithe retreated—but not very far, certainly never very far. Hardenberg approached his visitor. The two beamed at each other as they shook hands, then spontaneously embraced each other—patting each other vigorously and exuberantly on the back, as men instinctively do. Hardenberg was a full head taller, making for an almost comical sight.

"Ahmed!"

"Sven!"

The two men looked at each other jubilantly, their hands still tightly clasped.

"Or should I call you 'Aladar'?"

"No, no, but please only in private with Ahmed, not everyone needs to know who I am," said the former inmate with a wink.

"Your German is still excellent, Ahmed, but you've changed a lot physically—I wouldn't have recognized you on the street. I like your black beard."

"Well, it was quite a long time ago." Guest Ahmed smiled and stroked his well-groomed, short, European-looking beard with satisfaction.

"Almost five years, Ahmed—if I remember correctly?"

"Yes, you do," Ahmed said, looking around the master's study. "I knew you'd make it, but this exceeds my expectations. And you don't look a day older."

"Well, well, Ahmed, I rather think you knew exactly what to expect here—a *cultural attaché* isn't sent to an old acquaintance without information."

Both smiled because they understood each other.

"I can promise you one thing, dear Sven, my government does not know *why* I'm visiting you."

"I like that; you've adopted the German habit of getting to the point without much banter. Sit down first, let's have a drink, then we can get started ... we've waited long enough."

As if on cue, Mrs. Anders knocked briefly and entered the room. Hardenberg indicated that he would pour himself and that she should retire.

"Sven, my sincere, deepest condolences on the death of your wife. I'm truly very sorry!"

"Thank you, Ahmed, thank you very much."

They were silent for a moment; the surprise guest drank tea, while the host drank coffee and tried some shortbread.

"Sven, I'll get straight to the point, and I know the information won't leave this room."

Sven nodded as if it were the most natural thing in the world, and Ahmed accepted this promise without question.

"You once offered me your help, now I must ask you to keep your promise. After my return to my homeland, I applied to my country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was offered a position based on my language skills, which I have continually improved. Two years ago, I was approached by the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, known as VEVAK. My superior, Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Ejei, is a friend of my father. I did not and do not agree with everything my government does, but I serve my country, I am committed to bringing about change and progress instead of just lamenting. By the way, I am very happy to be back in Germany."

Hardenberg listened patiently and thoughtfully, an art he himself had only fully mastered in the last few years.

The guest continued:

"My country has its back to the wall. We have few friends in the world, and unfortunately, few in Germany as well. While the

nuclear power Israel continues to occupy Palestine and slaughter Arabs, we officially belong to the 'Axis of Evil.' In the new year, a new president will be sworn in in the USA, and we expect a more liberal foreign policy, even though he will be under great pressure. The Federal Republic of Germany, on the other hand, as my government sees it, is governed by a female chancellor who is subservient to Israel and who heads a state that should and must stand 'unconditionally' by the Jewish state. When it comes to resistance against Israeli occupation and terror, she blames everyone else 'clearly and exclusively.' This woman and her policies are unbearable and dangerous for everyone, not just the Germans. You know, I love Germany, and with your help, I want to change this relationship. You have connections ... right to the top; that's where we have to start. And then there is the order ..."

"Which order?" Hardenberg asked suspiciously.

"THE COMING ONES. I have full access to all files and dossiers. The VEVAK doesn't know much, but we know of the order's existence and power. And we know of your close ties to it."

"And what exactly do you want, no, what exactly do you want from me?" Hardenberg was now very wary.

"I would like to exchange information with you, only to the extent that you can be responsible for it. I ask you to intercede, as we want to expand and deepen our relations with the German nationalists—we already maintain excellent relations with the left—and we want to work on the German media's perception of Iran. We would like to have better contacts with German high-tech and aerospace companies in order to advance Iran's self-sufficient satellite program more quickly and efficiently."

Aladar Haddad-Adel fell silent, giving Hardenberg time to process the request and respond if necessary. He declined to comment on his country's urgent request for uranium for its nuclear power plants.

"I'm sure you weren't expecting an immediate answer, my friend, even though I readily admit I'm sympathetic to it. The enemy of my enemy isn't necessarily my friend, because no matter what I decide, for me it's always about Germany first."

"Yes, I respect that ..." Ahmed nodded approvingly.

"And what you say is largely true: Anyone who doesn't love the Jews is branded an anti-Semite, and anyone who criticizes the nuclear-armed Israel and its UN-ignoring leadership is an enemy of the Jews who must be destroyed socially and legally. The *Jesus murderers* continue to slaughter Palestinians, as they are doing again now, but they don't know guilt, because only the evil Germans are to blame—even the German Pope in Rome is reviled and defamed if he doesn't kowtow as required and eradicate any movement that even dares not to be an 'unconditional friend of all Jews.'"

The diplomat saw the pain and sincerity in his counterpart's eyes. Meanwhile, Hardenberg continued speaking:

"You know, Ahmed, I've never been a friend of extremism, and I don't want to and will not blindly condemn all Jews, but I'm so fed up with the conditions in this country, indeed in this world. At the moment, I'd prefer to withdraw into private life, but I have a daughter, a child of my fatherland, she is my everything, and that's why I will fight until the last day ..."

"The power of the so-called 'Central Council of Jews in Germany' must be broken—surely you agree with me?" asked Hardenberg's guest.

"Yes, I completely agree with you, but perhaps not in the way you think. The political clowns in the Central Council or ZdJ instigate, manipulate, coerce, and exert enormous pressure, both political-ly and socially, and they are doing themselves and the numerous decent Germans of Jewish faith a tragic disservice. But you have to give these ZdJ Jews one thing: They are fully committed to their own interests. I respect that! The Catholics and Protestants have resorted to turning the other cheek, even when not asked to do so. Their time will soon be up. The Muslims will

never gain a foothold in this country—and you mustn't be angry with me, dear Ahmed—and will always remain alien. Orthodox Islam is actually a blessing for us German patriots because it keeps the ordinary Koran believer within the necessary intellectual, social, and economic boundaries, thus guaranteeing the failure of any idealistic integration, which neither side truly desires."

Ahmed almost choked on his still warm tea as he swallowed the remains of the housekeeper's delicious slice.

"What can I say, Sven, you amaze me again. Our smartest analysts assess the situation in Germany just like that, but I've never heard such a clear and far-sighted characterization. I'm certainly allowed to use your words, and I'm sure I'll score many points for that ..."

Both men laughed briefly. Hardenberg immediately became serious again:

"My friend, you must understand that the Jews—and here I mean the minority, the influential ones—don't complain, they act ... and when they whine, they only use it as a weapon to achieve their desired goal. Oh yes, their power must be broken, but only by the Germans representing and enforcing their vital interests without fear of loss. If we allow them to cut off our balls and ultimately dilute and control our brains, then we don't deserve to be masters, but will remain vassals."

"But you would never allow this, would you, my friend?"

"Never, Ahmed, NEVER!" The men looked at each other, feeling a kindred spirit. They found the moment's speechlessness pleasant.

The skillful guest spoke again:

"I know I'm asking a lot of you, Sven, and the timing is bad... I will wait patiently for your answer, but the Federal Republic ..."

"Yes, yes, the Federal Republic ... you know, Ahmed, in the USA there is a so-called 'extremism': the Ku Klux Klan, the right, no

matter where or when, to hoist a swastika or hammer-and-sickle flag, negro *rappers* who chant calls for the killing of little white boys because they might one day grow up to be big white men—and what happens in this society without muzzles and bans on thought? Damn it, a half-black man with Muslim relatives on his father's side and even German ancestors on his mother's side is elected President of the United States of America! Absolutely impressive. And in Germany? Every day more and more words and thoughts are forbidden in order to allegedly protect 'liberal democracy', but this state terror, this politically correct, woke oppression, this dictatorship from above, is exactly the environment in which extremists, dissidents and guerrillas are bred ... but the do-gooder, the *Gutmenschen* Federal Republic of Germany is gleefully marching forward—with drums and trumpets into the abyss of its arrogance and perceptual distortions!"

Hardenberg paused to drink coffee, but also to prevent himself from talking himself into a rage.

"I can't even think about Dresden," Hardenberg continued, "I could cry when I think of this bombing holocaust by Allied terror planes with well over a quarter of a million dead! Dresden is not alone; there were so many German cities ... and then the expulsion of countless Germans from their own country, from our Reich ... the murders of my people, of the children and the defenseless, the millions of rapes of German women from Freiburg to Berlin to Königsberg ... even Pope Pius XII said: 'The expulsion of millions of Germans is the greatest crime in history.' But what do the gullible Germans do? They say 'escape' instead of expulsion; they speak of 'perpetratorship' instead of victim status. They believe any lie, as long as it is anti-German enough; none can be sufficiently crudely conceived, as Napoleon once noted. Anyone who mentions genocide against the German people is immediately called a 'Nazi.' But I would rather be a *Nazi* than a

foolish member of a German sheep herd who has had its wool pulled over its own eyes."

Hardenberg's house guest was now completely calm; he knew the demons of the Germans, and he understood them. He liked the fact that his host, even after so many years of political struggle, could still react so sensitively to these truths of the *Zeitgeist*—and he hoped that, at least for a few minutes, he might forget the pain of losing his wife.

"I understand you all too well, Sven, and I bow to your logical skills. I could still learn so much from you, but also find out about you, I'll be completely honest about that. I haven't deceived you and I won't do so in the future ... Besides, it's already late, and I don't want to disturb you any longer; we still have plenty of time to talk. I'm in Berlin indefinitely."

"I'm truly pleased, Ahmed."

"Nevertheless, Sven, I feel obligated to give you one more vital piece of information. I don't want to cause you any more pain, but I also want to prove to you how sincere my offer is. I need my briefcase."

Hardenberg called for Geithe, who fetched the briefcase that had been stored in the cloakroom.

"Boss, the sentries just reported that our guest is causing a stir, not to mention the neighbors."

Hardenberg's neighbors had since been informed about who lived next door to them. There were quite a few who harbored prejudices and fears. Nevertheless, the atmosphere remained friendly, unless an access road was blocked off. Hardenberg had already managed to acquire an adjacent villa, which would serve as accommodation for the increasingly large security force, including weight training and martial arts facilities and a small shooting range—the extensive renovations were to be completed soon. Another property was still pending, but a secret service

had also made the owner an offer. Hardenberg, however, would outbid every offer and demonstrate to the current owner which decision would be the "least dangerous."

"Who's out there, Major? Alphabet boys?"

"Germans, Israelis, Americans, who knows what agencies are lurking there—most likely all of them! The spooks are snapping photos like crazy again."

Hardenberg looked at his guest:

"You knew, I suppose, that your visit would not go unnoticed?"

"Definite, no problem, I indeed assumed observation. I can only hope I'm not compromising you by being here."

"Not at all. I've lost my reputation for a long time," joked Hardenberg. "Such life is known to be carefree. Your visit also reinforces the myth of my person; the evaluation *specialists* will rack their brains again—about what we have to do with each other." Hardenberg then addressed Lars: "Major, the boys should lay low, not take any measures."

"*Jawohl!*" Geithe went to the guard room to transmit the order via radio.

"Sven, what I'm giving you now, I give you in friendship. I trust that this will remain between us, just as I trust that this house is bug-proof." The 'diplomat' produced an envelope from his heavy, fire-resistant briefcase.

"We tracked down a photographer who works for various services. Now he's working for us as well. As I studied his pictures, I noticed that some of them have something to do with you."

Ahmed handed over the first prints.

"These are target acquisition photos. These show a manor in Bavaria, owned by a former intelligence officer. According to our information, he left this property to your late wife. If you ever

choose to explain this to me, I would be grateful, but there is no obligation."

'Rittmeister,' Hardenberg thought mechanically, a chill running down his spine. 'What do you have to do with this whole thing? Wasn't your death voluntary after all? And why did you leave the property to my Dagmar? I've asked myself that so many times since I found the deed in the Swiss safe deposit box—and I still ask myself it!'

Dagmar Hardenberg was equally surprised at the time; she had arranged for the caretaker couple to receive lifelong residential rights, including a monthly salary, which Dagmar jokingly liked to call an 'appanage', an allowance. Sven Hardenberg missed his late wife painfully, terribly painfully. He shook his head briefly to banish the sad thoughts of her and avoid falling into a hole.

"Perhaps I'll explain it to you later, my friend!"

"Of course. The next photos are from Tegel Prison in Berlin—taken about a week before your release. By the way, I only recently learned that there was probably an attack on you on the day of your release. Is that true?"

"Yes, that's right." Hardenberg took the photos with a slightly trembling hand and looked through them meticulously.

It was already late, but Ahmed gave him time.

"I hate to show you the last photos, but I want to prove my unconditional friendship. My service knows nothing about this; I'm doing this without any permission. And before you look at them, be absolutely certain that if you demand blood revenge, I will do anything to support you—anything!"

The Iranian handed a stack of photos to his old friend. Harden-berg had barely looked at them when he visibly slumped, feeling as if he had aged several years.

"Who ... did ... that?" he asked haltingly, barely able to control himself.

"All the target acquisition photos were intended for an address in Frankfurt am Main. Our contact says it's MOSSAD, but we haven't been able to confirm this yet."

"Names?"

"We don't have any yet, but we're working on it. The prints are yours, my friend. Listen, I'd like to say goodbye now. I know you need to gather yourself first. I'll get back to you in a few days as soon as I have any news. I'm already looking forward to our next meeting."

"*Mi casa es tu casa*, Ahmed. You are always welcome here, my friend, and we are now comrades in arms. Nevertheless, let me tell you one thing with all honor and sincerity before we seal our alliance: Zionism, anti-social capitalism, imperialism—there are many arms of the global kraken that we can and must fight together, but I will always and primarily be a German patriot and put the interests of my fatherland first. The greatest danger is still the foreign infiltration of our streets. Germany is small and never will be a country of alien colonization! I certainly welcome exchange students, university students, tourists, spa patients, economic relations, and close international friendships, and I will always strive for them. I also respect all religions, but Muslims in particular have no place here—neither as welfare asylum seekers nor as immigrants. While not a popular opinion, but mine nonetheless. I don't mean to offend you, and I owe you a great deal—we both know why—but I have always held this sentiment, and I will always be its champion."

The most welcome guest, to whom Hardenberg felt obligated because of his life's debt, thought briefly and looked at his friend with genuine affection for him.

"As a proud Iranian, I agree with you, and you know I love Germany—but I was born in Persia, and I will die there! Please believe me, my friend, I fully understand and approve of your position."

The two men stood up and hugged each other goodbye, and Hardenberg also accepted the benevolent Arabic kiss on the cheek good-naturedly, albeit reluctantly.

"Ahmed, do you still know the watchword of the GERMANIC BROTHERHOOD?"

"Yes, I've heard it often enough."

Sven Hardenberg straightened up and said fiery:

"Brotherhood!"

Aladar Haddad-Adel replied fervently:

"In life and in death!"

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Alone again, Sven Hardenberg looked at the last series of photographs once more. His house, his security measures, his cars, and above all, his wife shopping, exercising, with little Viktoria Wilhelmine, with her husband by the water, in the mountains, shopping in downtown Berlin—all captured on baryta paper for half an eternity.

The assassination was *in fact* aimed at his wife, his faithful companion; it was no mistake; the beasts hadn't prepared the wrong vehicle; they wanted to hit his beloved Dagmar, presumably even his adored daughter, in order to bring about the death of Sven Hardenberg's soul.

There would be deaths, he would take revenge! Perhaps he would die, lose everything—but now there was no turning back!

He called Geithe to him; plans had to be made, and the family had to be secured in the event of his demise. The new year would soon begin, and the signs on the horizon were tinged with blood red.

***"Knowledge is pain, as we know, and
dreaming is certainly disappointment—
but I would rather suffer with enlightenment and
hope than endure the torments of an ignorant cynic!"***

Legacy of Blood

He was dressed in black and still damp on the outside, but his neoprene diving suit kept the wetness and cold of the dark night away from his steely body. He barely felt his almost 50 years—he was a highly trained professional and mercenary, active and capable. Twenty years had passed since his service time in Kühlungsborn. When his command was disbanded after the fall of the Berlin Wall, he didn't want to join the West German Navy, and the *Deutsche Marine* didn't want him either. He received his assignments from a comrade and contact—they were both members of the MARINEKAMERADSCHAFT DER KAMPFSCHWIMMER OST, the East German Combat Swimmers' Association. He had never accepted an assignment in his own country before, at least not after his instructive early years as a contract killer. It was risky—and highly dangerous. If the *Kampfschwimmer* Association ever found out about it, both he and his client would be targeted for execution. Money had been tight lately, and the child support payments for his two children were not insignificant. He had also adopted a luxurious lifestyle—not to mention his expensive and pampered mistress from Russia. Since the economic crisis at the end of 2008, contracts from Arab countries had been scarce, and he lost most of his investments in the unforeseeable collapse of *his* "US investment bank," LEHMAN BROTHERS INC.

He had an auxiliary volunteer—who was occasionally called upon to help him—take him nine kilometers south in a speedboat from the Scharfen Lanke, north of the Großer Wannsee. Since there was hardly any inland traffic on the water at that time of year and time of day, he had himself dropped off early. The "Hiwi" would stay with his boat for a certain amount of time, but then disappear. The time window was tight, but it would have to do. His expensive equipment was put to use: his diving

apparatus was an oxygen rebreather, which had “fallen fresh off the back of a truck” on the way to Eckernförde two years ago. There were no air bubbles; three meters below the calm surface, he was safe from detection.

The black-clad expert also carried his HECKLER & KOCH P11. Although he didn't expect any special security measures to be required underwater, his experience nevertheless compelled him to carry an underwater pistol. He would leave it, along with his other superfluous equipment, on shore. He carried only the new compact P2000 SK, two spare magazines, and his beloved combat knife with a matte-black blasted stainless steel blade, the use of which was his notorious specialty. If 30 cartridges weren't enough for the mission and his retreat, he was doomed anyway, because according to the information provided to him, he could expect fierce resistance. He was a professional dispatcher: reconnaissance, infiltration, and stealth assassination contracts were his strengths—he couldn't and wouldn't compete with a well-trained bodyguard or security detail. That wasn't his goal either—he wanted to get in silently, kill the target and withdraw unseen.

April's unstable weather took a break; the previous day's drizzle gave way to a weather wormhole—a climate standstill with no forecasting possibility. The lake's mirror-smooth surface cracked barely noticeably as a black figure crawled toward the shore. The target property had direct access to the water, but according to the client, this would be unguarded and unsecured. Kneeling in the shelter of the boathouse, the frogman silently disrobed of his equipment and, with a few simple movements, prepared for the assignment on land. He looked at his illuminated watch, which he covered with his other hand. There was only one condition: the attack had to take place in the early hours of 20 April, between 3 and 4 a.m., because the changing of the guard was at 4 a.m. The

moon was crescent-shaped and waning—and the patchy cloud cover was helpful. The new moon was not for another five days.

He knew the imposing villa from pictures, and he had memorized the floor plan photographically. There were two targets. He accepted such assignments only very rarely, but the payment was lavish—and only one target had priority; the other should only be eliminated when the opportunity arises, of course for a generous bonus. The two bedrooms of interest to him, belonging to both targets, each had a window facing the lake. These were unlit, although there was plenty of indirect light in and around the property. Through his infrared glasses, he could see the motion detectors directly on the house, but not the burglar alarms, but he knew they were there. The residence was hermetically sealed, but this hardly bothered him, because he had an unexpected trump card—an infiltrated contact. He felt the inevitable excitement growing within him; his breaths became shorter and shallower. Now he had to suppress the adrenaline rush, just as he had learned in commando training. The stress hormones combined with a lack of oxygen created a constricting tunnel vision—and this lack of perspective inevitably meant swift death for any elite warrior. The old combat diver paused and breathed deeply and slowly through his mouth and nose, now his heartbeat under control again.

He made his way along the dark hedge to the side personnel and delivery entrance. The agreed-upon Morse code—three short, one long, three short—was immediately effective. The generously bribed defector, who had only been working for the Hardenbergs under a false name for three weeks, had already been waiting. The guard had been assigned to this section, so that he was responsible for the aforementioned entrance that morning. This service entrance was also used by the sentries and bodyguards, who were quartered in the adjacent villa to the north and could

access the property of their boss through a secret door in the dense hedge.

The door opened, and the paid traitor strode out, his MP7 aimed at the assassin. The latter held his empty hands out in front of him and smiled a friendly, disarming smile at the young guard. Now the mole opened the door, nodded, and smiled benevolently at the man in black. At the same time, he took his finger off the trigger, secured his weapon, and gestured to his opponent to follow him. Lightning fast, before he could report anything, the professional threw a steel noose around his neck. Instead of pulling the trigger, the young guard inevitably grabbed the deadly rope with both hands—his now ineffective weapon dangling from his shoulder strap. This was his final mistake; he wouldn't be able to spend his Judas wages on easy women, fast cars, and debauched casino nights—the old soldier drew his dagger and stabbed his adversary between two neck vertebrae. He was dead instantly. This was not planned or ordered, but he never left anyone alive who was so trusting and thus a dangerous source of error for him.

He dragged the warm body across the cold, tiled floor and quietly placed it at the end of the small hallway, keeping his submachine gun pointed at the dead man's chest. He heard faint noises coming from the guard room to the left of the villa's main entrance, but the alarm system was flashing green, and he knew his colleague was suspected of being outside the door for a cigarette break. Smoking inside the property or within sight of the Hardenberg daughter meant immediate dismissal.

The grand staircase in the entrance opened up, and he knew the way forward. Now he was on edge, the tension was high. He carried the knife in his right hand; the handle gripped firmly but not convulsively, the blade nestling against his forearm. He made his way upstairs without haste, his padded rubber soles making

no sound. Arriving at the gallery on the first floor, he paused. He listened and *sensed*—his surest defense. To the right, at the end of the south wing, the owner of the house lay asleep. He would be there in a few steps. He knew hardly anything about his targets, and he didn't want to know anything. To the left, at the end of the north wing, his daughter slept. He knew the photographs his client had sent him—such a lovely thing. Without hesitation, he turned left; three more doors, and he would be with her; she wouldn't wake up. Viktoria Wilhelmine was his main target; he had to send her into the great void as quickly as possible with a clean stab to the heart.

He reached her door and grasped for the massive handle. From the corner of his left eye, he saw a figure at the small spiral staircase leading to the kitchen. For a brief moment, he froze. The unknown figure screamed and dropped a full silver tray. Even as the alarm sounded and the bright security lights flashed throughout the house, he stormed into the room, ready to stab her. Damn! ... The covers had been turned down, but the four-poster canopy bed was empty! He quickly looked around the room; seconds counted. She wasn't there, neither under the bed nor in the open walk-in closet. He could no longer take care of the adjoining bathroom. Two experienced guards rushed up the main staircase, covering each other. He spotted them first and smoothly raised his weapon. Both guards took two hits to the chest and staggered to the ground. Their vests gave way, and the fabric particles of the protective package filled the air.

Now members of the bodyguard were on the stairs, coming down from the attic. Voices from the ground floor indicated that more armed guards were on the way. Their first concern was Hardenberg, who was just opening his door, crouching down, and frantically trying to assess the situation. Through the wide-open door at the end of the long hallway, he saw the killer—standing in Viktoria's room, facing the east window. Before he could fire a

shot, his bodyguards, jumping from the landing into the hallway, blocked his clear line of fire. He shouted, "Take cover!" The two men abruptly dropped to the ground and, not knowing the exact source of the danger, aimed in all directions. Hardenberg shouted again, "In Viktoria's room ..."

The professional cutthroat shot at the second large window overlooking the magnificent Wannsee. He could still escape, but it would be a close call. The window remained intact, however, because, like the walls and exterior doors, it was bulletproof—misinformation from his client. Another damned flop! The housekeeper was also supposed to be off work and away. He'd never failed a job so severely before. He operated the lockable handle of the window, and it opened smoothly—and why not? After all, the Hardenberg estate, despite strict security measures, wasn't a prison. He threw himself out the window and landed hard on both feet. He rolled over the left side of his body on the lush grass carpet, as he had practiced hundreds of times at the Rügen sky-diving school, and was immediately ready to fire again. A pain shot through his leg; he'd sprained something, but there was no time to worry about it. If he could get to the water, he could still make it. Even without equipment, with the large-capacity lungs of a trained diver, he could swim underwater longer and farther than many Sunday swimmers above.

The bodyguards stormed the suite. They anxiously searched for the intruder, but also for the little princess of the house. The normally cool-blooded and calm men were wild with worry and rage. The Berlin residence was on alert, the house was filling up via the staff entrance, and the grounds were illuminated for a systematic search. The guards had known when they saw the lifeless man in the staff corridor that things were deadly serious. Lars Geithe was shouting orders; the majordomo was furious, and his voice could be clearly heard across the lake. Geithe had spent the night playing poker in the guardhouse and was now

blaming himself. He ordered two of his best men to the boathouse to search the area and guard the shore. Other men were ordered via radio to launch boats to search the lake, while others were to inspect the street and the area around the manned gate. Anything unusual was to be reported promptly.

As the two ex-GSG9 fighters reached the boathouse at a run, they saw the silhouette of a man approaching something. He heard them coming and acted with lightning speed. Simultaneously with the first shot, Geithe's men dropped back and fired single shots from their submachine guns. They knew immediately they had hit the target. Geithe rushed to Hardenberg, who was now surrounded by several bodyguards. Everyone looked tense and grim. Hardenberg sat on the edge of his bed, stroking his daughter's white-blond hair. The lights were out for security reasons, only a small flashlight flickered. At the first alarm, Hardenberg had thrown his *little one* to the floor, grabbed his weapon, and stood in front of her. Now she was completely distraught and was being cared for by her father and the still-trembling housemaid.

Shots rang out behind the villa. Two armed men rushed to the windows and took up positions, while Geithe ran back downstairs. Hardenberg signaled to Mrs. Anders that she should stay with Viktoria, as did all the guards. Then, wearing only his dark pajamas, he ran after Geithe, who was running ahead. Several security guards had now gathered at the boathouse. They were all aiming at the stranger, who lay on the ground with wounds in the stomach and neck. He clutched the ready diving gear with his left hand, while, searching for his weapon, which had already been collected, he groped sleepily and without energy across the damp lawn with his right hand.

Geithe cleared his way and aimed at the robust, yet aging assassin. Only Hardenberg's command could stop the coup de grâce.

Hardenberg looked into the old combat diver's eyes, which were still astonishingly clear, but steadily losing their vitality.

"Who is your client?" No answer.

"Does all this have something to do with the big meeting tonight?" Still no answer, but a brief flicker of the eyes.

"Why my daughter? Was she perhaps the mark? Did you want to treacherously murder a small, innocent girl?" Hardenberg asked, almost whispering, but lethally. This sentence had an impact. The man lying there looked up and recognized the owner of the house, who was not his primary target. With a final effort, he gasped out a bloody reply: "It was nothing personal ...". He even seemed to raise his shoulders in an innocent gesture, while his dying body trembled again.

It was an oppressive scene. Just a week ago, an enraptured little girl was searching for the "Ostara eggs" hidden by her father on the property—the festival in honor of the Germanic goddess of life and fertility had been full of joy and happiness. Currently, a few meters from Dagmar's interred ashes, this bestial murderer was desecrating the sacred plot of land belonging to the family patriarch. While the birds chirped merrily at the life-giving spring, Hardenberg nodded to Geithe. All the men took a step back while the majordomo delivered the blow of mercy to the murderer, who was surrounded by morning dew. Hardenberg flinched briefly at the bang and contemptuously spat in the face of the redeemed man.

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"What the hell was going on, Lars?" Geithe knew it was extremely serious. His friend and boss was beyond upset.

"I can only confirm that he was alone. We've searched everywhere. Boats are still searching the waterways, but we're unlikely to have any success."

They were sitting in the kitchen, coffee was being brewed. Only Geithe and the lead watch officers in charge of the four shifts were allowed to be present. Nervousness was palpable.

"That damned bastard almost killed my daughter ..."

"I know, boss, I know..."

Both men trembled at the thought.

"I'm so glad Viktoria slept with me today. You know, when she's sick, she always crawls into my bed."

"And don't forget the old witch. If she hadn't warmed the milk and wanted to bring cough syrup, that piece of shit might have been successful after all. She'll get a big kiss from me personally afterwards," Geithe said lovingly and gratefully.

"Don't worry, Major, I won't forget, definitely not. She'll get more than a kiss from me. But now, to the most immediate matter: What about Kevin? That swine must have opened the back door. The rat should just be glad he's already dead ..."

"Maybe he just had a smoke ..." Geithe remained skeptical, but at least tried to be unbiased.

"Without turning the alarm back on? I don't think so. I want to know everything about that sneaky piece of shit. Double-check and triple-check him—I have a gut feeling. How long was he with us?"

"Who? Kevin?" Geithe turned questioningly to the shift supervisor, who was in charge from 10:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m., before continuing: "A month, or so?" Sascha, the shift supervisor, nodded, concerned. He hadn't liked the newcomer, but had been ordered to add Kevin to his shift for the time being.

"Sascha, you can go back to the guard room, have everything checked again. The relief for the early shift will be later today." The shift supervisor clicked his heels together, bowed his head toward Hardenberg, and obeyed Geithe's order. He slipped out soundlessly like a wet poodle.

"Major, I never want to see Sascha again. Today he'll be paid off generously and sworn to secrecy. Anyone who lets their guards smoke in the yard without observing the alarm precau-

tions has definitely screwed up. Is he really trying to fool me?" Hardenberg was incensed and continued to rant. "If the insidious attack hadn't failed, this bungler would have been out of service too—but for good ... no different than Kevin."

Everyone present knew that this would have happened.

"What about Ralf and Christian, Major?"

"Both of them were hit in their bulletproof vest, a few broken ribs, but otherwise they're fine."

"Do we have any other injured?"

"No, boss, none," reported Geithe.

"Have the two comrades taken to the clinic straight away, call *our* senior doctor and tell him to sort this out without making a fuss."

"Jawohl!"

"What about the Glowanias?"

"Wolfram's house is under additional security. I'll go over later, when everything is taken care of, and explain the situation to his wife."

"No, leave it, I'll do that later, because you'll have work to do ... and now to the corpses ..."

"I already have a boat prepped and on stand-by, we can make them disappear."

"Good. Have them searched, and don't forget fingerprints ..."

"It's being done now, boss." Geithe was on his toes, and he knew it was for the best. He had vetted the young guard and hired him a few weeks ago. Ultimately, he was responsible. "And what about tonight? Everything as discussed?"

"Everything as discussed, Major. High alert at the meeting, and you're responsible to me! So, the criminal investigation agency will be here soon; they'll have a hell of a lot of questions, because the shots certainly didn't go unnoticed. Tell the *Kripo* officers it was wild boars, and a few guards were frightened. They won't believe us, but we'll buy ourselves a little time. The guard officers are to go to their men. Everyone has been informed of our story and will be sworn-in afterward. I'll personally brief the body-

guards. By the way: There will be big bonuses for today's service, especially for Wolle and Dirk, since they took down that bastard ... what a damned fuck-up, and just now Wolfram has to be out of town. Legal twisters are just like our police friends in green—when you need them, they're never there!" Hardenberg scoffed. The two conspiratorial friends laughed thoughtfully at the premature, ominous start to the day.

Wolfram Glowania had been living in the newly acquired villa south of the Hardenbergs' since the beginning of the year. His family was happy because they now had space. His portly wife was very kind, and their five children were often wild rascals, but they were his happiness. The Glowania family occupied the two upper floors, while the ground floor was converted into a spacious office. The small law firm had two legal clerks, two paralegals, and a very capable trainee lawyer. Hardenberg's attorney had been commissioned by him to close and relocate the accounts in Switzerland. In March, the bankers of Switzerland, Austria, and Liechtenstein announced that they would rapidly weaken banking secrecy—capital flight had begun. There were many safe ways to manage cash elsewhere, as long as the bank's head spoke German, because Hardenberg fundamentally didn't trust anyone who didn't speak his native language!

Geithe wanted to leave, but Hardenberg called him back:

"Major, call Sunja, have her come. I need her now—and at least one secretary to keep the minutes. We'll have a full house here soon. After you have spoken to her, you and the other two shooters will be gone, lest the investigators start looking for gunpowder residue." Finally, Hardenberg gave a small, relaxed smile: "It's a shame about your weapon, Major. You just got it new, but it has to go, and the two MP7s too ..."

"Are we going to war, boss?"

"Yes, my friend—we are going to war!"

"It's about time ..." mumbled Geithe as he walked.

The eventful night was long, and the investigation into the incident took longer than Hardenberg initially expected. However, with the help of the diligent and confident trainee lawyer—especially with the crucial support of individual officers from the Rittmeister Group—the excitement among the police and the neighborhood was kept within bounds. Hardenberg had expensive gift baskets from a delicatessen delivered to all residents on the street, as well as to the neighbors on the other side of the small bay, to calm the situation. The gunshots, the alarm, the lights, the screams, and the boats caused considerable unrest in the area surrounding this tranquil, peaceful community.

Hardenberg's majordomo Lars Geithe dutifully performed his exceedingly grimy but essential task with precision. The blood-stained corpses disappeared irretrievably, the incriminating weapon parts were scattered in various bodies of water around Berlin, the injured guards—who were hospitalized for a few days—slept peacefully and unfazed, and the negligent officer of the watch was handsomely paid off and wisely left the country that same day.

A superbly equipped reconnaissance troop, tasked with scouting out and assessing the recently announced venue for the unavoidable and highly important gathering that evening, was deployed and would remain on site throughout.

By early afternoon, Geithe and his remaining men had returned to the Hardenberg villa, exhausted and hungry. He made a round of guard duty, making sure everyone was at their posts. Viktoria Hardenberg and Mrs. Anders were still in bed—their midday rest was more than necessary after the early morning's adventures. Afterwards, the majordomo went to his master to report. Both were dog-tired—their reddish, swollen eyes burned from the exertion and the aftereffects of the adrenaline rush.

The meeting didn't last long, but the most important things were discussed. Hardenberg solicitously ordered Geithe to finally go to bed and get a couple of hours of sleep. He would follow suit. The two men were to meet with the experienced group leader of the Life Guards promptly at 6:00 p.m. for the final discussion of the evening.

The gathering was scheduled for 9:00 p.m. sharp—this event was to be the most important in Sven Hardenberg's political career and his patriotic struggle.

***“UNITY is our strength,
HONOR our dogma and
LOYALTY our duty!”***

The Coming Ones

The approaching spring night was already quite dark and cool, with only a sliver of moonlight shone glittering on the seemingly slumbering waters. The mysterious island of Schwanenwerder, originally called Sandwerder, was already considered the pinnacle of economic and social advancement during the imperial era—even in the German version of the famous board game "Monopoly" before the Second World War, this arcade was considered the most valuable possession. Hardenberg's escort drove in three large limousines over the only bridge leading to the island. The villa, which resembled a small hunting lodge, was pleasantly lit, and the entrance gate was manned by armed guards. Numerous limousines with drivers waited in front of the entrance and also on the property grounds.

So close, yet so unknown, thought Sven Hardenberg, who was sitting behind the passenger seat of the second sedan in the center. Hardenberg would never have imagined that such an important dwelling could be located barely two kilometers as the crow flies from his home. It seemed more than strange that he never heard anything about it—not even rumors. Geithe sat to his left, scanning the area with night-vision goggles. Furthermore, the majordomo received radio reports from the four-man reconnaissance patrol, which had a good overview of the area and had been keeping an eye on it for many hours. The unregarded property of the *Meisterzirkel* or master circle, the inner sphere, had only recently been revealed as the meeting place of the clandestine order, THE COMING ONES.

The bodyguards would have to remain in front of the main gate, as stipulated by the unanimous invitation that all members of the Inner Circle had received and readily agreed to. The honorable

task of organizing the colloquium was, in keeping with the cycle, always assigned to a different master. Hardenberg, too, had become a member by now, albeit only *de facto* and with little enthusiasm. His contacts were of written nature; he received valuable information that was always accurate, and he also provided the order with information from his orbit of influence, to the extent that he could and wanted to take responsibility for it. He sensed, however, that this rendezvous would entail far greater obligations, but he resolved to listen soberly, objectively, and impartially today—all the more so after the failed assassination attempt in the early morning hours, which he and others associated with this gathering. When his enemies took such steps to prevent him from coming here, his curiosity was reawakened—and so was his willingness to be more accommodating.

His men fanned out, while he and Geithe were driven directly to the main gate. The security check at the entrance gate seemed cursory to an outside, untrained observer, but it was nonetheless very thorough. Each member was allowed to bring a second, and Hardenberg had chosen Geithe. At first, he wanted to come alone or with his lawyer and friend, but after the loyalty he had shown that morning, Hardenberg knew that his majordomo and security chief more than deserved this recognition. The patrol numbered more than thirty vehicles, many of which disappeared after the "cargo unloading." Hardenberg could calculate that the house would be full—which was another reason why he was glad to be armed. Hardenberg was ready to face any danger. A final adjustment of the white bow ties on their tailcoats—the invitation had prescribed "*Cravate blanche*"—and the two men were ready to explore the unknown.

The social evening was much more pleasant than expected—Hardenberg was wooed and courted by the many members of the order, full of curiosity. Aperitifs were served in the small ballroom. The gentlemen introduced themselves individually. Geithe

took notes as instructed, and Hardenberg also received a business card from each of them. He also met the obscure manager of the estate, who, however, modestly withdrew after a short time to oversee the preparations for the festivities. The estate was supervised and maintained by this old third-rank member of the order. Who exactly owned it was not mentioned—and Hardenberg didn't ask either.

The official part was quite something. The twelve masters of the order of the world regions, their deputies, and the selected members of the Inner Circle introduced themselves once again—all of them German or of German descent. The masters were all of retirement age, so that the guest of honor felt both physically Herculean and biologically half-grown. Thick information folders containing the activity and progress reports from the past four eventful years were handed over. The masters met at these intervals. Only Hardenberg's folder was more bulging, and he also received a briefcase with additional material, as he needed to be brought up to date.

Individual members recounted their successes, failures, and future plans; Hardenberg was also fully included. Only then did the exchange of ideas conclude, and the floor was given to the acting spokesman of the secret society. He was there in place of the master of the order responsible for the region of Western Europe, because "Thurisaz"—the actual designated spokesman and regular host—was terminally ill in Barcelona and thus unable to attend the festive reception. Just nine years ago, another master, based in Buenos Aires, Argentina, was the most influential until he was "disempowered" after the country's economic collapse in 2001. Now the spokesman of the order, the *father*, was concerned with Hardenberg—exclusively with Hardenberg. Before the assembly, it was made clear who Hardenberg was and what he meant to THE COMING ONES. It was shortly before midnight, and they knew everything about him—truly everything.

The twelve masters of the order present asked Hardenberg for a detailed report on the early morning attack, and he did so without hesitation. Naturally, he omitted the fact that there had been casualties and that Geithe had disposed of the bodies. He was also questioned about the death of his beloved wife and the attempted attack after his release from prison; here, too, Hardenberg answered openly and honestly. Ultimately, he had nothing to lose, because if he wanted to, the participants wouldn't leave the island alive. If it had been a trap, Geithe would transmit the coded order by radio. If he or Hardenberg were unable to report regularly, for example, due to their deaths, Hardenberg's security forces would storm the villa and wipe out everything inside. After the morning attack, in the privacy of his home, Hardenberg had made a decision: he would take off the velvet gloves from his iron fists and burn them irrevocably.

THE COMING ONES rightly suspected that Hardenberg should not be killed barely twenty hours earlier, as in the bloody deed that led to the loss of his wife, because he could then serve as a political martyr, which would potentially be even more dangerous for his enemies. As a broken and weakened man, he would serve his opponents better, reducing his own myth to absurdity, revealing his weakness and incompetence. Everyone agreed that Hardenberg should join the mysterious organization fully and unconditionally, because it would make attacks on him and, above all, on his family and those close to him senseless and unnecessary. Hardenberg would then have transferred his contacts and all his knowledge to the order, and Hardenberg's removal would be of little use, since the fight would continue undeterred and no less vigorously. The assassin had failed to prevent Hardenberg from taking part in today's meeting, and now—should he decide, unchained and without restraint, to become a full member and master of the order of Western Europe—it would be too late and politically ineffective to paralyze him. Sven Hardenberg whole-

heartedly concurred with this logical assessment; it was all too plausible ... and so strikingly simple.

They dined lavishly and gave Hardenberg some time to make an irrevocable commitment—for those who joined the order did so until their death. The circle of masters estimated the probability that the chosen master-in-waiting would refuse as vanishingly small. This calculation simply had to be correct, for the order needed Sven Hardenberg—he was their promising guarantor, their hope, their guarantor of survival.

On the morning of 21 April, Hardenberg had made his decision. The mid-forties man accepted the offered membership and the future position as “European Principal” of the order, and with it the status as unofficial secular leader of the circle of masters, contentedly and with full certainty—not for the protection, but for the beguiling power that would make him and his faith immortal and timeless. He would annex this supremacy, this superiority, seize it ruthlessly—and no one, not even the order, would stand in his way. They were now thirteen masters again—twelve commanders and one spokesman.

Hardenberg ceremoniously received his three figural, gold-decorated insignia within a well-prepared secret ritual of the masters of the order. These insignia were never to be shown to the public; with a few ceremonial exceptions, they remained locked and guarded.

For the first time in his life, Sven Ansgar Hardenberg had submitted himself to a higher, more powerful authority. The secret society, the ORDER OF THE COMING ONES, had now reached its goal—the Eleusinian society had brilliantly and on schedule accomplished the most significant, monumental step into the promising 21st century.

He clutched the timeworn warrior's neck tightly, his body no longer under control. The face of the doomed master turned red as he wheezed almost inaudibly, trying in vain to stammer one last sentence. His eyes begged Hardenberg to stop—not out of fear, but because he had imagined the situation differently. The newly appointed master from Berlin, however, was unable to unclench his fingers; his soul commanded him to strangle the tyrant mercilessly. What he had learned just seconds ago, after a pleasant, hour-long conversation, robbed him of his reason ...

Since the former head of the order of Western Europe was unable to attend the conference in Berlin, he had formally requested, through his representative, that his successor, Hardenberg, visit him in Barcelona so that he could hand over the office of master properly and completely. Time was of the essence, as the doctors were noticeably worried. On the Wednesday following the meeting, Hardenberg, Geithe, and four bodyguards flew from Berlin-Tegel to Barcelona in a privately chartered jet. The long-range GULFSTREAM V/550 was extremely comfortable and luxurious, yet Hardenberg had long considered purchasing his own jet—especially since he had now devoted himself entirely to the order.

He now possessed sufficient funds—the amount he had received from Hans Rittmeister was astonishing. Where the old warhorse got such money from would always remain a mystery. He also learned two days ago at the order's assembly that each master received an annual expense allowance of €20 million. Hardenberg knew he could multiply this sum fivefold within a year—the order had excellent contacts with investment firms with "insider knowledge" worldwide. Two chauffeurs from the order were already waiting for the enlightened VIPs from Berlin in armored limousines with tarmac clearance.

Hardenberg's group arrived at the outgoing master's villa in the early afternoon. Since the elderly man was still sleeping under the influence of medication, the staff served coffee and mineral water. The suffering old man's bodyguards introduced themselves, and formalities were exchanged. They were tasked with offering Hardenberg and his family a detailed and revealing tour of the estate, which he eagerly accepted, full of curiosity. The library completely captivated him, but the soundproof and specially protected computer center in the spacious basement literally took his breath away.

This was the order's headquarters in Western Europe, and this was where all the world's reports converged. Many intelligence agencies would have turned pale with envy at the sight of the sophisticated technology. There were numerous employees, all with academic degrees. They greeted their new boss coolly but obligingly. They had already received the news of the change in leadership yesterday—their loyalty lay with the order, and thus also with the master it had chosen.

At 4:00 p.m., the personal physician appeared and announced that the old master would now be receiving Hardenberg. He had requested an additional adrenaline injection, even though the doctor had pointed out that this could and likely would be fatal. Hardenberg was to ascend to the sleeping and sick chamber alone, while Geithe and Hardenberg's vigilant bodyguards were asked to watch and listen in the monitoring room—there was no audio recording, however.

Hardenberg knocked politely and entered purposefully. A gentle "please enter" sounded, but the guest, in his dark suit and comfortable, open collar, didn't hear it. The large dormitory was impressive, almost majestic, but it smelled of disease and decay. Cancer had eaten through the aging old master from the inside out—and the putrid odors were his confession.

"Please, Sven, sit next to me!" Using the control device attached to the bed frame, the addressee, pumped full of painkillers, adjusted the height of the headboard; now he was sitting almost upright and could receive his guest with dignity.

Hardenberg silently moved the leather-covered armchair closer to the bed and sat down to the master's left. To his right was a high side table. Next to pill containers, a water bottle, and an antique table lamp lay a fine LUGER pistol, the master's reliable "service weapon."

The old man's voice was quiet, but audible and filled with authority. The utterly bedridden man's head was completely bald. He tried to adjust the collar of his silk dressing gown with his still-functioning right hand.

Hardenberg repeatedly glanced around; several monitors hung from the ceiling, showing various news channels from all over the world. They remained silent throughout the meeting.

"Sven, you are now master of the order, my successor, and it is customary that we address each other informally," said the host subduedly.

"My name is Kurt Steinbauer, and it's an immense honor to finally meet you. I've waited so long for this moment, my whole life ..." He sank even further into his pillow, exhausted. "We don't have much time, so I'll start right away, if you agree. I know everything about you, Sven, and by now you should know everything about me."

"Yes, indeed, Kurt, I agree. I came to listen. You can imagine that I have thousands of questions, but I will be patient—as much as I can in these circumstances."

Hardenberg smiled friendly at the old man.

"Ah, Sven, you are consecrated with manliness and decency, how glad I am that my expectations are being fulfilled. I will tell you everything I know, perhaps answering some of your countless questions along the way. You will now hear and find out a great deal—some of it will seem unbelievable, some will frighten you, but my knowledge now belongs to you. It will be a short version, but I have recorded my life, all has been documented ... you will be able to read everything after my death. Now let us begin. I am Kurt Steinbauer: soldier, schemer, dreamer, despot, idealist, murderer, German patriot, and master of the secret society ORDER OF THE COMING ONES. I place at your feet a monstrous power of the civilized world—may you be able to conquer and use it better than I was able to ..."

He spoke of himself, of his life, of the order, of the secret nature of the world, of his successes and his guilt. His narrative power grew with each sentence—and Sven Hardenberg listened enthusiastically, irresistibly captivated by this moving tutor. Steinbauer had Hardenberg rescued from the attack after his release from prison—even with this realization, Hardenberg increasingly felt how the unfathomable puzzle was taking on greater clarity, gaining more and more profile

When the speaker had finished, both rested in contemplation. Then the dying man broke the gravely silence:

"Have you received your consecrated insignia? I wanted them presented to you ceremoniously."

"Yes, thank you."

"Study them carefully, they contain many inscrutabilities," the old man promised meaningfully..

"I will do that—most certainly."

"Maintain this residence as the order's headquarters; we have close ties to Barcelona's economic and political elite—this means priceless protection."

"I will seriously consider recommendation—but I need some time before making any final decisions."

"I have one lifetime wish for you, Sven: My current employees have always been loyal to the order and to me. Please keep them employed, but if not, destroy them, for their knowledge of our secrets is too valuable and too dangerous."

"I think I'll keep them if they really prove that capable."

"I trained my warriors, my guards, myself. The one who rescued you after your release from prison is their exceptional and capable leader—you met him earlier. This abode is their home; they would die for it. Sven, my warriors are honorable, brave, and unconditionally loyal—give them a chance to prove themselves. I beg you for this promise alone."

"You have my word of honor," Hardenberg vowed..

"Do you want to stay in the Federal Republic of Germany? I was never able to do that. 'Dubium sapientiae initium,' philosophized the great René Descartes—doubt is the beginning of wisdom. What can one possibly make of a state system that prohibits doubt by law?"

"Nothing, Kurt, absolutely nothing—and that's why I will be remaining in the FRG, because only then do I have the prospect and, above all, the right to change anything about it."

"You know what's coming, Sven, right? Well, I'm sure of it. But what about your family? What would you do if you were dying and realized it was all for nothing?"

"If I should die, my family will be veritably provided for—everything is settled and in order. And I already know that my fight was not, is not, and never will be in vain. My primary concern was never for the people. True patriots will experience disappointment and betrayal again and again, but in times of the worst setbacks, I always knew: It's about Germany! That's what keeps me alive, Kurt, that's what gives me strength—and I won't let anything or anyone rob me of that faith!" Hardenberg's large blue eyes flashed relentlessly.

"Sven Hardenberg, you are favored by the gods. You were born to rule men by force of will. You are the right one—without reservation," the old warrior affirmed sincerely, closing his eyes, mentally and physically exhausted.

Hardenberg leaned back and waited patiently. Just when he thought the old man wouldn't wake up again, he prepared to stand up and leave—the hour with the venerable gentleman had passed in a flash. Time flies when you get what you wish for.

"A few final words, Sven." Hardenberg remained still, while Steinbauer seemed to mobilize his last strength..

The master operated a remote control with his right hand, and now Geithe and the others could hear the spoken word, which caused general surprise. The head of the household's men had also been unprepared.

"Sven, please take my order ring."

He extended his trembling right hand to Hardenberg, who effortlessly removed the ring from his bony ring finger. It felt as heavy as lead—as weighty as the office he was about to assume.

"You'll have to have it adjusted, but as the wearer, you'll be overpowering. People will obey you, but also envy you—only you will know what inhuman sacrifices will be demanded of you."

"Thank you, Kurt, I will do everything I can to prove myself worthy of this reign."

"I present to you my trusty *Zero Eight*, loaded and secured—it has served me well, please cherish it." He handed Hardenberg the Parabellum pistol, also called the "08" or "LUGER." He could barely hold the weight of the weapon, let alone use it—his spirits were visibly draining him.

Now came the most important words of the consultation:

"Sven, I have followed your life's path; you were destined for this sacred path. But you needed protection and motivation—I deemed it necessary to take your foothold; only then could you embark on the path of your destiny. I, Kurt Steinbauer, commissioned foreign mercenaries to sabotage your parents' plane ..."

The day instantly lost its warmth. Hardenberg was struck as if by lightning, barely able to breathe. What was he hearing? That couldn't be true? What to do? What was he supposed to do?

The invalid continued his confession:

"I ordered the murder of your parents—you were meant to belong to the order, and only to the order ... today I know it was an unspeakable mistake—so senseless. May the gods be ..." He couldn't continue, his prayer for mercy remained unanswered, for Hardenberg's swift, darting hand mercilessly squeezed his throat.

Steinbauer's men heard the demonic revelation and were dumbfounded to hear that their master, their mentor, their *Allfather*, had ordered the slaughter of a family—for family was sacred. Nevertheless, they were proud that everything was going as he had predicted—and they were proud of their new master, who acted strongly, unfailingly, and ruthlessly. When Geithe and his companions tried to storm the first floor, the house's guards blocked their way.

The leader spoke quickly and reverently to Geithe. Their master wanted this venerable, respectful death at the hands of his successor. Geithe understood and allowed the situation a few more minutes. As if hypnotized, everyone looked back at the oversized main monitor. The loudspeakers in the room remained silent for only a short time.

... how could all this be happening? Hardenberg loosened his grip, yielding to the pleading eyes of the still-living corpse. Steinbauer coughed violently, muttering incoherently, while Hardenberg stood over him—his left hand still clenched in a death grip, his right damp and clutching the LUGER.

The old man's color slowly returned, and he made a last great effort in order to speak again:

"Your path is set in stone ..." He coughed again. "Kill me ..." Thick saliva trickled from his mouth. "See my private records—my men, my associates and personnel ... they knew nothing about this ... only I ..."

Steinbauer tried to fill his lungs completely with air, but failed. He reached for the oxygen mask, but couldn't get hold of it—Hardenberg made no attempt to help.

"Please, brother ... please let me ... die like a soldier ... I deserve it ..." His eyes were fixed on the firearm in Hardenberg's right hand. There was no trace of timidity; Hardenberg recognized merely pride in the old eyes—pride and steadfast certainty.

Hardenberg awoke from his daze and respected the old master's courage. He saw the graceful, familiar faces of his parents and grandmother before him—they smiled encouragingly at him. A single tear of exhaustion wet his cheek. He impetuously grabbed a small pillow, pressed it against the old man's face, released the safety catch on his Luger, and fired without hesitation. In the moment of death, Kurt Steinbauer knew that his legacy had been passed on and was now secure—peace of mind took hold of him.

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When Sven Hardenberg came down the stairs, it was done solemnly—with majesty. His men had been waiting for him at the entrance. He looked at them one by one, his weapon still in his

hand. Then he looked at the three men in the background. They waited without fear, bowing their heads in recognition of his attitude. Hardenberg responded gallantly. He handed the pistol to the leader and said he would return shortly—until then, the leader would have supervision and command authority, but also the responsibility. The long-haired, blond giant was well aware of what this meant—he had already known it when his symbol of commitment, the BLACK SUN, was tattooed on his forearm and when he received the order ring after passing the test to become a warrior of the first degree. He pledged his life, and he did so gladly—for his existence was nothing, the order was everything.

Without complaint, they cleaned the large room and removed the evidence. No one else in the house had noticed anything. The Spanish personal physician issued the death certificate without further questions—as his old friend had wanted. The inner torture, the suffering, had ended. The LUGER was cleaned and preserved, for its new owner had given no orders to the contrary.

They knew what should happen to the now-covered body: The master of the order wanted his ashes scattered in the Teutoburg Forest at the foot of the Hermann Monument—in memory of the greatest hero of the original Germans: Arminius, the liberator of the Germanic people. The ashes of the master's loyal and irreplaceable valet, who had died two years earlier and whose position had remained vacant ever since, were also scattered here.

They wanted to meticulously fulfill this last favor for their old superior. Afterwards, they would devote themselves entirely to their new master, who had completely impressed them.

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Hardenberg was on the plane; he just wanted to go home to collect his thoughts. He wasn't yet sure how things would play out. The hotel reservations had been canceled. The flight crew had to

be located by the bodyguards, as the return flight wasn't scheduled until the next day. He had barely spoken during the long wait in a nearby restaurant.

His men didn't pressure him, but they wanted to leave the country as quickly as possible, expecting the GUARDIA CIVIL, the national gendarmerie of Spain, to arrive at any moment to arrest their boss for murder—but no one had come.

Now it was almost midnight, and Berlin was getting closer and closer. He wanted to see his daughter, to stroke her head as she slept, to kiss her ... he needed the certainty that the rest of his family was safe, that they were within reach—and that what he had experienced several hours ago was just a nightmarish specter that needed to be shaken off. Then, finally, Hardenberg spoke to Geithe—he seemed to have made a partial decision.

"Listen, Major, do you remember when we talked about a 'Night of the Long Knives' after Dagmar's death?" Hardenberg spoke quietly and urgently.

"Yes, boss, sure!"

"Well, back then it was more or less out of pain—I wanted base revenge, ignoble retribution, I wanted to hurt someone, I wanted to lash out blindly ... but now it's serious, very serious, it's about reckoning. We made a list—how far along were your plans at the time?"

"You ordered it back then, so I drew up the battle plan. I knew you weren't ready yet—but my men are prepared, because I sensed this crisis would come one day. I hope you're not angry, Sven, but I'm ready and eager to strike—it's like being in prison: you're the thinker and the leader, I'm your sword! I don't always see through everything, and I don't have a problem with that, even though I sometimes feel helpless. Nevertheless, you are my family ... and Viktoria ... and Mrs. Anders ... and our men ... whoever attacks my family, I will kill ..."

Geithe ließ nun seine Anspannung der letzten Stunden erkennen, Hardenbergs Schmerz war auch sein Schmerz. Er war froh, sich endlich aussprechen zu können. Hardenberg andererseits erkannte wie nie zuvor, daß er diesem Menschen sein Leben anvertrauen könnte.

"Yes, brother, we are family—and it will always be so," Sven Hardenberg said meaningfully, placing his hand on Geithe's powerful arm. "We will implement the battle plan because we will protect our home. Our enemies are numerous and strong, but we wouldn't have it any other way."

The two friends grinned in unison.

"How long would it take you to practically prepare the plan? When could we strike?"

"In six months," Geithe answered without hesitation.

"We need more security guards, good men, money is not an issue. The Glowanias must be better protected. The enemy will undoubtedly also target my trusted lawyer and his family."

"No problem, I can get the men quickly."

"Well, then get going, Major—because the wind is changing, and the storm will come quickly!"

The decision had been made—both felt instantly free and detached from the chains of futile reason.

"A cleansing storm of steel, boss?"

"Yes, my friend, definitely a cleansing steel storm. We're now crossing a line forever ... and while we're at it, I'm going to settle some old scores."

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May Day, the day of the work-shy stone throwers, was supposed to be the hottest in a long time—and that's not just the almost unbelievable spring weather that had been lingering for weeks. A general economic crisis, media frenzy, and the pervasive hostility toward everything *German* would further ensure that left-wing extremist stupidity could wreak havoc from Ulm to Berlin on "In-

ternational Workers' Day". Right-wing nationalist circles had also announced that they would not leave the public streets to the black masked "chaotics" and violent gangs of foreigners, but would instead display their flags, their fists, and, in contrast to the bloodthirsty "Germany-must-perish" faction, their faces openly and proudly.

Hardenberg, not wanting to rely on the one-sided and uninformative reporting of the "free press," the "legacy media," forged a plan with Geithe to send unarmed members of the bodyguard and security detail undercover to the May Day demonstrations. Only in this way could he, as the new master of the order, obtain a true picture of the political fronts.

Two security guards were sent to the leading national party in Berlin-Köpenick, while three bodyguards, with another three guards as backup, were dispatched to Kreuzberg, where murderous left-wing extremists hunted down young, underpaid police officers and brutally set fire to three of them.

Two additional reconnaissance teams were sent to Dortmund as observers and to Ulm in Swabia as rally participants. Hardenberg and Geithe were rightly concerned for their men, but knew there was no alternative to this course of action.

The evaluation of numerous reports, recordings, and subjective feelings of the courageous fighters, some of whom brought home injuries, was quickly accomplished—the groundbreaking conclusion was frightening: If red fascist hordes could not take action against the right, they would have little left to do, and "ordinary" citizens were increasingly allowing themselves to be abused as a defensive wall by the dictatorial Germany haters—old, trusting grandmothers were forced to carry an "anti-Nazi whistle" on the sidelines of mass rallies, while innocent children in left-wing demonstrations had to hold up the "red card against the right."

In Berlin, old members of left-wing autonomous groups, who hated the state, except for the social welfare checks, built Molotov cocktails for foreigners and antisocial "boozers" punks, while "criminal migrants using guerrilla tactics" coordinated by phone to ambush unhelmeted police officers and rain down feces-covered cobblestones.

The next day, the words of the "Social Democratic" Interior Senator from the SPD party were heard and read: "It's like with sexual offenses: Once the woman has been undressed and raped, it's easier for others to join in." What did that mean? If the crucified and overcome "cop" lay bloody on the street, did it matter how many more culprits brutally "ejaculated" on him? Unspeakable, shameful, perverse ...

Hardenberg and the order recognized above all that the FRG's ruling class would never allow national forces to express themselves decently, non-violently, and serenely in public. The members of this class would use every means to suppress patriots ... and their reaction? Patriots increasingly resorted to violence as a last resort, the *ultima ratio* of the unheeded. These upright men and women were tired of being spat upon, mocked, and harassed; they would allow neither the state nor the criminal "Antifa" mob to scourge their right to freedom of expression or even physically threaten them.

The days when patriots walked calmly and patiently through cities in the rain of deadly stones and bottles are undoubtedly over. Forbearance was yesteryear, the masochistic spirit had served its purpose.

The state failed in its duty to protect and guarantee freedom. The fact that there were no deaths on this 1st of May was, as the German police union also stated, purely a matter of chance.

The German loyalists of the fatherland would never again turn the other cheek, under no circumstances would they allow themselves to be led to the slaughter—they had to finally learn and internalize this lesson on May Day of this year. Everyone involved had understood that the Zeitgeist had changed, and therefore all patriots had to forge new paths ... each for themselves, each under their own responsibility. The direction of the wind had finally changed; the new course, an indispensable strategic move, had long been determined. Now it was time to set sail—irrevocably and fatefully.

***“My passport is inevitably the property of the
post-war Federal Republic of Germany,
but my heart and my loyalty belong unconditionally
to the Greater German Reich!”***

Loyalty for Loyalty

Over the next few weeks, Hardenberg was exceptionally busy, well, except for the 24-hour hangover after the *moist and happy* Father's Day celebrations on 21 May. The European elections in June were a complete success: nationally oriented, euro-sceptic parties were the true winners of the vote—and the all-powerful order, THE COMING ONES, had contributed significantly to their success with financial and intelligence support. Wolfram Glowania was sent to the order's headquarters in Barcelona—it was his task to prepare the takeover of the secret society. He and his family were now very well protected, and this duty applied even more abroad. He was accompanied by assistants, technicians, and a complete security team under Geithe's leadership. The files of all employees were now stored in Berlin and were being thoroughly examined.

Dr. Helmut Mende from Zurich had stood by Hardenberg since his release, and financial matters were also handled through his office. When the longtime friend and companion of Hans Rittmeister was asked at the beginning of May to visit the manor house in Berchtesgadener Land to settle and record the previous owner's personal affairs, Mende immediately agreed. With the help of the Schmidhubers, the caretaker couple, he was to take inventory, then award contracts for an extensive modernization and a complete expansion and renovation—the deceased owner's study was to remain expressly untouched as a mark of respect. The property, which would now be called "Dagmarhall," would serve as a well-secured seminar, vacation, and recreation center for the Hardenbergs, their employees, and their friends. Dr. Mende assembled a team of luminaries and specialists; because money was of no consequence.

Mrs. Anders was offered an urban condominium. Hardenberg had already practiced this with his parents' loyal cook, Magda, who lived happily and proudly in Hamburg and sent Sven a cake, stew, or something similar almost weekly via Deutsche Post—a kind gesture that she refused to stop despite polite requests. Mrs. Anders, however, didn't want a property; she indignantly rejected the idea of owning her own apartment—she insisted on staying with "her" Hardenberg family. Hardenberg was pleased with her decision, and Viktoria would have struggled to cope with losing her surrogate mother. Hardenberg insisted on giving the pearl of the house a generously filled savings account, which the Berliner ultimately accepted—she had two nephews in Marzahn who would surely be more than happy to receive additional tuition money from their esteemed aunt.

Mrs. Anders now held the mixed status of housekeeper, valet, and master of ceremonies—menial tasks, according to the master's instructions, were taboo. She had to supervise staff and organize the sometimes chaotic daily routine. Craftsmen and gardeners came and went, packages and groceries were delivered, and the new cooking team for the villa of the greatly expanded security force needed to be instructed. Her little darling, however, enjoyed absolute priority; she guarded the little princess like a jealous mother hen—all the more so after the terrible night of the attack, which both had taken well. Deep into the night, she occasionally scrubbed the large kitchen on the ground floor—against Hardenberg's express wishes—just as a soul-savoring act of a frugal housekeeper.

The miserable political conditions grew interminably. The capitalist system imported from the decrepit land of "unlimited *impossibilities*" blatantly revealed its greatest weakness—the monetary bubble burst and ran, slick and wet, down the cellulite-covered inner thigh of the post-war Federal Republic of Germany's remaining pride. The oh so grand response of the "judgmentally

sound" government was a five-billion-euro generational debt "for the good of the German people"—popularly known as the "scrap-page premium." The auto industry rejoiced—the "foreign" auto industry, mind you. German automotive parts suppliers filed for bankruptcy, German families were left with nothing, while FRG do-gooders babbled about another, never-ending "war debt," our contribution to peaceful global understanding—the Germans' eternal economic shot to the head as a kowtow to the world. This was also why the time had come for Hardenberg to strongly support the BFP, *BUND FREIER PATRIOTEN*, which had long since ceased to be "secret," in achieving an official party status.

The other "right-wing" parties had worn themselves down and exhausted themselves in internal infighting, financial irregularities, antiquated ideologies, and general incompetence. The task was to present a modern, patriotic faction to the capable but embittered core of the now party homeless and frustrated. Frank Hühn, Hardenberg's friend and then deputy, had done valuable work in expanding the league. Now it was time to further educate and initiate the BFP chairman—he was to become a member of the order. THE COMING ONES had anonymously financed the formerly covert BFP since its founding by Hardenberg. Frank Hühn was to become chairman and candidate for chancellor at the party's founding meeting—the party was also to be called "LEAGUE OF FREE PATRIOTS." Now things would be done properly. The political spirit of the republic was at its lowest, operating only through prohibitions and repression—the era of diplomatic restraint was irrevocably over. Frank Hühn seemed to be the right man for this self-sacrificing and risky task—and Sven Hardenberg would hold his protective hand over him.

Sunja Helmecke, like her parents, came from the circles of a patriotic youth organization. She was often mocked for being "different," but this no longer hurt as much as it used to, for she now laughed at these people, these obedient conformists, so "the

same," *Einheitsmenschen*, uniform and standardized. She had already known Wolfram Glowania as a visitor to her parents' home and as a participant in the annual summer camp; she saw how his large happy family advanced and his children grew up as educated, decent patriots. Her father's old classmate and comrade in arms became a lawyer, and she, too, knew that she wanted to become a lawyer—because, as she felt, anyone who didn't know the law in this republic was gagged and enslaved by constitutional law. She realized this again painfully when the Federal Republic of Germany's Interior Minister had banned her organization on 31 March 2009.

Sunja's unerring reasoning was clear: the system was hostile towards young Germans who studied, played the piano, hiked fields and forests, sang folk songs, cultivated camaraderie, rejected drugs, preached loyalty to their homeland, and, without a sense of wrongdoing, braided their long blond hair. Anyone who didn't snort cocaine, didn't know the lyrics of current "porn rap music" by heart, didn't dance the night away to exotic melodies, didn't sit in front of a bloody computer game during the day dreaming of a glorious killing spree, didn't order prostitutes from Eastern Europe, didn't languish in egomaniacal materialistic self-realization, or celebrated sexual depravity as a panacea against the *old German* bourgeois society, was, it seemed to some candid observers, viewed as uncomfortable, unsafe by those in power.

Alleged *modernity* continually demanded "tolerance and acceptance," which were always presented in the form of makeup-covered perversions. Nefarious gangs of dark-skinned foreigners terrorized entire neighborhoods across Germany, contemptuous left-wing extremists set fire to cars and houses at will, gluttonous "business bosses" signed both the dismissal papers for countless employees and the multi-million dollar order for the new ocean-going yacht moored off Mallorca with the same tainted ink—and every day, German children, disenchanted, join the ever-length-

ening lines at soup kitchens ... but only the "diehard, unspeakable neo-Nazis" had to be ostracized, accused, branded, condemned, expelled, and declared outlaws—who was a Nazi was, of course, determined by the dictatorial ruling caste, depending on its expediency. These "people's representatives," Sunja casually fantasized, would soon realize that their instinctive disgust and fear were justified, because the clean, brainwashed-free rest of Germany would never surrender—and that was a good thing!

The soon-to-be fully qualified lawyer had always liked Hardenberg, even idolized him a little—but he hadn't paid much attention to her. This changed when Sunja Helmecke proved herself extremely capable and skilled after the assassination attempt on 20 April. The crafty trainee lawyer was about to take her second state examination and was scheduled to complete her nine-month legal internship until the end of September. She had long known that she would accept her boss's offer—the 28-year-old would soon become a partner at the Glowania law firm.

Sven Hardenberg had liked Sunja from the start—she was bold, bright, and pleasing to the eye. She often reminded him of his wife, which may have been why he had unconsciously limited contact with her. Since the night of the hired assassin, she had proven herself invaluable and found her way into the confidential world of the new master of the order. Hardly a day went by without them talking, exchanging ideas, or simply chatting. The days when Sunja Helmecke only organized files and, at most, applied for gun permits seemed long gone.

As attorney Glowania was increasingly traveling on Hardenberg's business assignments, Sunja gradually assumed responsibility on the *home front*—representing Hardenberg's various interests was her responsibility; he and his obligations had become her calling, and she willingly accepted this responsibility.

When Hardenberg took her out to dinner for the first time back in May, she almost burst with joy, even though he steadfastly maintained his composure. They often went for walks or sat by the water. It promised to be a wonderful, warm summer. An occasional touch here, a pleasant embrace there—she hadn't dared hope for more. Helmecke loved Viktoria's laugh, and she found herself feeling a little jealous of the adoring glances Hardenberg reserved for his daughter. When they went on a boat trip in early summer, what they both wanted, what they desired, what they needed happened—they became one.

It didn't stop at that one time, but Sunja knew he didn't feel the same incomparability she did. He seemed like a lost soul, and she was the angelic savior who would temporarily ease his grief. When the affair was over, she felt no resentment, only gratitude that she had been able to penetrate him a little. Their encounters afterward weren't unpleasant; they were surprisingly comfortable and full of connection—an immortal friendship had been formed that would endure many more life trials.

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It was a wonderful afternoon—so warm, refreshing, and full of sunshine. She waited patiently in the large entrance of the house, enjoying the coolness. The blond youth was supposed to be sitting down, but he preferred to wait next to his mother. As he often did, he placed his small but already strong hand protectively on her shoulder. She sat quietly in her wheelchair and looked once more in the large mirror to her left, wanting to be as beautiful as possible for this encounter, given her situation. She was no longer trembling—and she was glad of that. It seemed to her as if she had been trembling for three months, ever since the day the letter arrived—the letter that turned her life upside down. The message she had waited for in vain for years, and at some point no longer believed could ever come, had finally arrived, contrary to all expectations. Oh yes, the message came ... and now

she was here, accompanied by her beloved child—here at last. The pounding heartbeat and trembling had stopped the moment she was hoisted out of the handicap taxi and the guards thoroughly searched her. She endured the electronic handheld probe check with equanimity and poise, knowing that on this 25 July, she had reached her destination—the destination of her journey, the destination of her existence.

Mrs. Anders had informed the master of the house that visitors had arrived—a Mrs. Freytag asked if she could speak to him. The name meant nothing to him at first. He stole away; the others were so busy that they barely noticed. The house pearl walked firmly ahead, while Sven Hardenberg followed in camouflage Bermuda shorts, a T-shirt, and flip-flops. He had learned to tolerate her acquired haughtiness and smiled good-naturedly behind her back. This loyal soul was a treasure, and if she needed this pride as self-protection or validation, then it could only suit him. They walked through the patio door into the parlor and then into the entrance hall.

“Mr. Hardenberg will see you now.”

Mrs. Anders announced his arrival with dignity and smugness, which always embarrassed him a little.

“All right, Mrs. Anders, thank you ... I’ll take care of it from here ... uh, you may withdraw.”

Hardenberg grinned as the *grande dame* nodded to the unannounced visitors and returned without comment. Now he had the opportunity to observe the guests. A beautiful, still young-looking woman with very short blonde hair and a handsome boy to her right. His eyes hadn't yet fully adjusted to the darkness. He blinked briefly. She seemed familiar; somehow he had the feeling he would have to recognize her.

“Sven Hardenberg—what can I do for you?”

"Come closer, Sven. Don't you recognize me?" That voice, yes, that voice. He knew it, it was burned deep into his memory, into his soul—but why? He moved closer. She could have been a top model, if she weren't handica... His unfinished thought was abruptly interrupted.

"It's me, Si..."

"Sigrun! Ye gods, Sigrun ...!" He rushed to her to embrace her. She clutched his neck, and he lifted her inexorably. She pressed herself against him as tightly as she could. Sigrun sobbed with joy, but also with grief and shame as she felt her paralyzed and numb lower body, involuntarily aware of him. The tears wouldn't stop—like her joy and her sorrow.

"Sven, please let me down, I'm much too heavy ..." He carried her with the lightness of a feather.

"Please, Sven, I can't breathe ..." He could have crushed her in that moment, and she would have passed away with joy. Hardenberg gently eased her back into her wheelchair. She straightened up, adjusted herself, and smoothed her pretty vintage pink summer dress. It was difficult to regain her composure, but she knew this was only the first step. She could sense his feverish impatience, and Sigrun Freytag wanted to satisfy that curiosity unconditionally.

"I never thought I'd see you again."

"I know, Sven, I've never felt any different ..."

"What are you doing here? How did you find me? What happened? Did you have an accident? My goodness, you're still an absolute beauty!"

"Oh, I'm already in my mid-thirties. You're the beauty, you've hardly changed ... Oh, Sven ... I'll tell you everything, but please give me a moment and read this letter first." She handed Hardenberg an envelope whose seal was broken..

He opened it immediately and read the few lines addressed to "A. + S. Freytag": Sigrun had, among other things, received permission to visit Sven. He was now the master of the order, and only

he could, and had to, ensure her protection. His address and a few personal details about Hardenberg were enclosed. The writer respectfully thanked her, but also her sister, for their commitment, their devotion, and their sacrifice in the order's struggle. He asked for forgiveness for having to postpone her "only personal" request for so long—the writer and sender did not further define this "request." But the document bore a signature: Kurt Steinbauer.

"You're with the order?"

"Yes, Sven, not as a member, but as an agent. My father trained my sister and me—he was a master until his untimely death."

"What's your sister's name?"

"Adelheid ... Adelheid Freytag."

"Why does this name sound familiar?"

"Perhaps I can explain that later. You'll learn everything—everything without exception." Yes, my beloved, thought Sigrun, you'll learn everything: how I fought, how I killed, how I was parachuted behind "enemy lines," right up to the day when neither my main parachute nor my reserve opened properly, which is why I'm now in a wheelchair, even though you haven't even noticed it—I love you even more for that, if that's even possible..

"I have plenty of questions, but I'll ask them later. Just one: Did you give me the records about the traitor Thorsten Schwamm?" Hardenberg pressed inquisitively—he had never forgotten their encounter in the GERMANENSCHÄNKE and the intoxicating, energizing night of love filled with magic.

"Yes, I had this assignment from the order, but only this one. Everything else was my decision—but you didn't let me decide, because when I met you, everything else didn't matter. There was never another real love after you ..." She saw Hardenberg looking incredulous, but she held his gaze because she was speaking the truth.

"How brave you were. Without this information, I would have fallen into a trap back then, and for that, I thank you from the

bottom of my heart—I thank you for everything else too. I've never forgotten it, never regretted it ... oh, my Sigrun, how wonderful it is to see you!"

"I'm so happy, Sven, I'll always be *your* Sigrun!" Full of emotion, she briefly avoided his beguiling gaze. "May I introduce you to someone?" They both looked at the boy, who didn't understand the context of the conversation but waited with self-discipline until his mother turned to him. She took her son's hand and kissed it.

"Sven, this is my son: Thore-Sven."

"Son? Well, hello. How old are you, my boy?"

"Eight," said Thore, a little intimidated.

"Thore-Sven? Where does the first name come from?" Sven looked at Sigrun questioningly..

"Thore after my late mother—her name was Thora Teutonia."

"Thora Teutonia? What a princely name! I admire ancestral loyalty. And Sven?"

"After his father—and that's you!"

"I beg your pardon?" Hardenberg was stunned, standing there a little foolishly with his mouth open ...

"Yes, my handsome Mr. Hardenberg, he is your son! Thore, shake your father's hand and say hello."

Hardenberg's offspring stepped forward and obediently extended his hand. Sven took it, knelt down, and pulled the boy somewhat clumsily toward him. He knew it was true, couldn't be any other way. Without a doubt, he would commission Sunja to take a DNA sample to the laboratory today. It was Saturday, and he wanted to be certain by Monday; he wouldn't even acknowledge the fourfold fee. His conscientious lawyer would insist on a lab test for legal reasons alone. The comparison of the so-called deoxyribonucleic acid of father and son would scientifically prove it, yet he already knew—Thore-Sven was his boy, he had his genes. Sigrun hadn't lied and wouldn't.

"A magnificent rascal, already so big and strong ..." It struck Hardenberg like a bolt of lightning, and he staggered for a moment. "Oh, damn ... Sigrun ... the pictures, during my imprisonment, the annual pictures with the blond youth, they were from you ... T.S., Thore-Sven ... of course ... It was always a saying that "In times of need you recognize a true friend" ... how could I not have recognized all of that ..." Before Sven could continue speaking or Sigrun could reply, a small, elf-like creature came back into the house from playing with its grandparents. A guard had opened the patio door and then immediately locked it again.

"Phew, Dad, it's damn hot today."

Hardenberg gasped for air, knowing that she got that expression from him.

"Honey, I told you not to use that gutter language ... and anyway, where's your hat? How many times do I have to tell you that only the common people get brown skin, while the noble protect their whiteness. This has been true for thousands and thousands of years." He laughed humorously.

Viktoria put on a winning smile—and her manly father melted away as usual.

"Grandma told me to take off my hat, and even my blouse, in this heat, but I kept the blouse on." The little prodigy looked proudly and defiantly into her father's loving eyes. Hardenberg made a mental note that he would have to talk again with Dagmar's esteemed parents, who visited very often, about cancer-preventing sunbathing behaviors.

"Daddy, who's that lady?" Damn! Only three years old and already so precocious, so amazingly articulate—Hardenberg was soon bursting with pride.

"Darling, say hello to the aunt." Viktoria Wilhelmine approached the wheelchair cautiously but without wavering, held out her hand to Sigrun, and performed a small court curtsy.

"Greetings, little princess, how preppy and well-behaved you are."

Sigrun looked briefly at her son and then at Hardenberg, who nodded yes.

"Darling, this is my son, his name is Thore-Sven, he is often just called Thor—and he is your brother."

Hardenberg's daughter grinned broadly, not at all confused or suspicious.

"Oh great, I've always wanted a big brother. Dad, can I show Thor my dolls?"

"Well, I wonder if he'd like that too... how about we all go swimming and have a delicious barbecue tonight?"

"That would be a good fit," said Sigrun cheerfully, the tension of her encounter with Sven tamed, "because it's Thor's birthday today!"

"Birthday? Oh yes, Dad, birthday! Cake ... and ice cream ... and chocolate marshmallows ... and more cake ... and presents ..." Viktoria went to her brother, pulled on his formal jacket, which his mother had forced him to wear for the day, and kissed him on the cheek. Then she spun around, clapped her hands cheerfully, and began to sing: "Happy birthday, happy birthday ..." Everyone laughed heartily, and Thore shrugged off his timidity, and immediately after that, his uncomfortable jacket, to chase after his sister like a bolt of lightning ...

The adults were glad that the situation could be resolved so easily. They held hands and enjoyed a few moments of silent intimacy. Everything fit—simply everything. They had a long conversation, and on Sunday evening it was decided: Sigrun and Thore-Sven would move into Villa Hardenberg. Sunja Helmecke became friends with Sigrun within a very short time—they were soon one heart and one soul. The trainee lawyer threw herself into the task assigned to her by Hardenberg—it was to adapt the property to be accessible for people with disabilities, which entailed extensive renovations. Mrs. Anders would move to the first floor; she would receive Hardenberg's suite. Thore would receive the large bedroom between Victoria's room and the guest suite.

Sigrun would receive the housekeeper's small apartment on the ground floor, as this was the one with the fewest wheelchair barriers. Everyone was able to redesign according to their own taste, and the highly paid interior designer and his furnishing expert were only too happy to accept the lavish requests.

The master of the house had long toyed with the idea of converting the top floor attic into a home for himself, which was now inevitable. There would be a bedroom wing and, opposite, a work wing, in between a magnificent wellness area with a sauna, a sensory shower, and a round whirlpool tub for the whole family—well, hypothetical, that is. In time for Christmas, the study on the ground floor would be transformed into a music and games room, with a pool table, a grand piano from BLÜTHNER, model "Kaiser Wilhelm II," and a large, recently completed painting depicting Dagmar with Viktoria, who was only a few weeks old. The weight training and gymnastics area in the basement was expanded to be suitable for children. Here, Hardenberg also trained martial arts with his guards. He was still delighted to realize that most of his young and strong bodyguards were a match for him, but not superior.

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Lars Geithe was injured—but he was only bleeding slightly. They almost got him, but he was faster and had outstanding support. The blond man at his side was an excellent warrior: nimble, talented, fearless, and sharp-witted. His training was outstanding, and the fact that he was responsible for security and orderly operations at the order's headquarters in Barcelona turned out to be entirely justified. Hardenberg had chosen him, and Geithe was once again forced to recognize the excellent judgment of his boss and leader.

Lars, Hardenberg's trusted security chief, and the new man at his side, Jan Lessing, had begun the pursuit ... their focus: a large,

heavily guarded group from a foreign intelligence agency. The two scouts were finally discovered in Frankfurt am Main ... too late, because the objective of the mission had been achieved. Lars Geithe and Jan Lessing had already identified the operations center of the spies they were spying on. The covert enemy had clearly been located faster than hoped. The valuable tip about the whereabouts of the spies and assassins had been provided by a loyal friend of the Hardenberg family—Ahmed kept his word and provided Sven with information from the Iranian secret service.

The rush hunt was fierce, but they escaped. Jan was older, yet faster than Lars—the veteran warrior had proven himself in his first mission for his new master, and Hardenberg's majordomo truly respected him, for Geithe owed Lessing his life. The shoulder wound hurt, but it was neither deep nor life-threatening. Geithe's mission was completed in a short time, preparations for the retaliatory campaign were almost complete—the time for reckoning was soon approaching.



When the *whole* world—or so it seemed—came to Berlin in mid-August to enjoy the joyful, colorful hustle and bustle of the 12TH IAAF WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS IN ATHLETICS, the residents of the villa at lake Wannsee decided to travel to the island of Rügen. The majordomo stayed behind to oversee the outstanding renovation work and to assist Wolfram Glowania, who once again had to travel to Barcelona to the order's headquarters, with his complex takeover research.

Hardenberg knew and loved the North Sea, his *Oceanus Germanicus*, and used to enjoy Sylt or St. Peter-Ording, but these places held too many sad memories for him, as the vacation spots of his happy childhood were still emotionally unbearable monuments to his murdered family.

Even the crossing on the car bridge, the longest in Germany, was astonishing—the traffic artery, touted as an architectural masterpiece, lived up to all the high expectations. The popular Baltic Sea holiday island drew ever closer, and the chauffeured passengers of the small, lavishly equipped rental bus, flanked by two armored limousines with the obligatory guards, were increasingly looking forward to escaping everyday Berlin life.

Sven, Viktoria, Sigrun, Thore-Sven, Sunja, Mrs. Anders, and Adelheid Freytag, Sigrun's sister, who had arrived shortly before, enjoyed the fresh, air conditioning free summer air flowing in through the panoramic roof window and sang along, more or less cheerfully and compelledly, to the children's songs that Viktoria sang incessantly. The *Demse*, the oppressive heat, was giving Mrs. Anders a hard time, but the Berliner absolutely insisted on coming along with "her baggage."

Adelheid Freytag had undergone a final medical examination in Germany. She had completely defeated breast cancer and was invited by Hardenberg to visit her sister. Hardenberg had already learned a lot from Sigrun, and she told him the rest: about Rittmeister, Birkle, the order, and the years on the Canary Islands, which, however, were never entirely happy. The Freytags were from Bavaria, and she wanted to go back there. He was now fully informed and could piece together much of what had remained vague. Adelheid was very helpful to Sigrun, so the master of the order suggested she come along.

The Baltic Sea resort of Binz, which celebrated its 125th anniversary, was a gem of Wilhelminian spa architecture. Hardenberg's traveling party immediately felt at home, and the first-class residence in the town promised a life of plenty and relaxation. The boss and his daughter and son moved into the largest maisonette residence with a tower on the third floor at the rear of the historic spa building. This 160 square meter facility with two

bedrooms combined privacy with the service of a five-star hotel. Above all, the building with the residences was easier to protect than the rooms in the actual hotel.

The Freytag sisters had a similarly sized residence on the third floor, which they shared with Sunja, including her textbooks and study materials. Two additional spacious residences were available for the eight guards. Mrs. Anders was accommodated in a spa house suite, as Hardenberg knew she would otherwise never be able to unwind and relax.

Since beds could be added anywhere, the little ones constantly sought out a different sleeping spot—sometimes they simply "bivouacked" in the empty whirlpool or fell asleep in Sunja's bed one door down, so that she ended up on the large pull-out sofa. The children's adventurous spirit regularly drove the security guards crazy—although they never, ever complained.

They all enjoyed the trip to the historic seaside resort of Prora each in their own way—Sven resolved to devote more time to showing his children Germany, their glorious fatherland. If Thore-Sven hadn't had to start private school in two weeks, Hardenberg would have extended his stay by a week. On the very third day, Sunja was tasked with reserving the entire Kurhaus residences for the fall break. Then Viktoria's grandparents, Lars Geithe and the entire Glowania family should also be there.

Claudius Ptolemy's map calls the Baltic Sea *Mare Germanicum* around 1507. On Martin Behaim's globe, dating back to 1492, the Baltic Sea is referred to as "das mer von alemagna," or "The German Sea." Visitors felt truly *German* on this venerable piece of land. Strolls along the beach promenade, consuming vast quantities of delicious ice cream, meals in the countryside under open sky, splashing in the sea, excursions on the sand, forays into the hinterland—the senses opened, the minds seemed to awaken

from a trance-like deep sleep; they were all able to breathe deeply for ten days, finding harmony, calm serenity, and gaining strength. Only now did Hardenberg realize how destructive and draining the last few months had been.

He needed these holidays, this spiritual distance, strolling casually through the crowds of holidaymakers, appreciating the “normality” and the feeling of “belonging” ... laughter and expressions of joy everywhere, so far removed from his endless duties in the German capital of Berlin and his grandiose earthly plans for the future—and there wasn’t a single day when he didn’t wish his Dagmar could experience all of this with him.

In quiet, contemplative moments, Sven enjoyed gazing at the picturesque Baltic Sea and reveling in his thoughts, savoring the infinity, the peace, and the inner tranquil. The painful longing for this carefreeness he had felt during those days, and had forgotten or didn’t know what it felt like anymore, seemed overwhelming once again, and the suspicion that all this might be just a fleeting dream within a dream stabbed a grim ache in his heart ...

In these moments, the patriot felt so alone, like the last of his kind, but he knew this wasn’t the case, and there were more and more of them—which gave him the forte to carry on. Hardenberg thus shook his head, banishing the dark fantasies and refusing to let the depressed mood prevail.

Imperative decisions and conclusions that could shatter Hardenberg’s biosphere were soon to be made, and he resolved to savor every carefree moment, for it could be his last.

Every evening at 9 p.m.—while the children were well watched over and sleeping, or at least were supposed to be asleep—Hardenberg and the adults ate together, enjoyed the sunset, sipped cocktails, and chatted at length.

It was these communal gatherings that led to the creation of a resilient, unbreakable bond of kinship and unity—an unearthly, transcendent metamorphosis, a renewal of the human soul that only a very few enviable ones ever experience.

The Last Judgement

The German walked through the Dutch night, through the shrill darkness of Amsterdam. He was searching for a substance, the stuff that would keep him alive, even if he despised and feared life. Like every night, he walked up and down the streets, waiting for an opportunity or for someone weak, even more powerless than he was. In a small corner bar for gays, he scraped together his last euros and ordered some bad brandy, but it did little good—he needed a shot to satisfy his rebellious body, at least for a short time.

It was here that he saw them and could hardly believe that the two well-groomed, athletic men were lingering in this dive, although he should not have been surprised—human depravity seemed to be independent of social class. He could even less believe the fact that the gentlemen were obviously interested in him. They toasted him, and he raised his glass with a trembling hand and smiled fakely. His rotten, coated teeth and yellowish skin marked him—a sick, mindless zombie, robbed of his soul.

The two strangers approached him and sat down at the counter, either side of him. At first, they conversed haltingly in English, then switched to German. He introduced himself as Hendrik and, feigning shyness, allowed the nameless compatriots to stroke his leg and back—he would do anything for the necessary drug. The strangers were tall and blond, very good-looking, so it didn't bother him that they called him "little faggot." He'd done much worse on his knees, willingly serving toothless homeless bums who had just received their welfare payments and hadn't yet spent it all on stinking tobacco and cheap booze.

His *compatriots* had something with them, and he wanted it urgently. Hendrik asked them to follow him—he knew a private place where they could "let off steam." The industrious Hendrik led them through the courtyard of a dingy brothel in the train station district. He quickly guided his two graceful, though domineeringly reserved, clients up the stairs of the rear building. The prostitutes seemed to decrease in quality with each floor—if that was even possible. At the very top, the three men were surrounded by shiny, sweaty, black faces—the loud, bizarre pounding music, the stench of urine, sour bodily fluids, and cheap skin lotion robbed the blond men of their senses, the foul breath of the drug-addicted "one-euro whores" from Africa made them feel unimaginably nauseous, but the willing hustler walked coolly ahead.

The small fix room was dark and suffocating—three sofas, smeared with semen, blood, and excrement, had been randomly placed around. Hendrik asked the two strangers to sit down, but they refused. He quickly pulled down his stained trousers; he hadn't worn underwear for a long time, threw himself on his blemished knees, and started working on the fly of the first *customer*—that was the law of the scene: first came work, then pleasure. The handsome foreigner stepped back in disgust and handed the male prostitute a poisoned "hit." Hendrik trustingly reached for it with a trembling hand without further question—the folded envelope was quickly opened.

The fire burned, and the outcast German watched the spoon as the bronze powder liquefied with citric acid and water. He fished the moldy syringe out of the back pocket of his dropped trousers, which were still hanging around his ankles. He tried to stay calm, not wanting to spill or waste any of the brown "smack" while drawing up the syringe. The pitiful search for veins wasn't easy, but like a thirsty man in the desert, this oasis of death was tangible to the addict—only this real life was a horrific mirage.

The two warriors of the order watched as the target reclined on one of the sofas. The junkie suffered only briefly, as his inflamed, abscess-covered body bucked in the cramps. The *golden shot* did its job, sending the former client of a German witness protection program into the eternal void. Thin feces ran down the sofa and dripped onto the torn linoleum floor, while the corpse pitifully bared its yellow teeth at the ceiling of the same color—a final, hopeless smile of unholiness for the kingdom of heaven before the purgatory of the underworld willingly received him with purifying intent of redemption.

Thorsten Schwamm, who called himself Hendrik, died during this late autumn as he had lived: bitter, disillusioned, and without dignity. The former informant, who had once deceived and betrayed Sven Hardenberg—his supposed friend and comrade—was still a young man when his ilk, his own kind, began to tamper with his meager carcass, searching for his last possessions ... at the same time, the two-man commando squad reported to Geithe by phone and hurried back to Barcelona. Mission accomplished.

ooooo

Frank Hühn, who had been elected party leader two weeks ago, was increasingly considered too fickle and too erratic in his public outlook on political principles and direction. His wife, on the other hand, was upright, strong-willed, assertive, and staunchly *nationalistic*. Why shouldn't Ramona Hühn lead the new party? A novel idea for Hardenberg, but the right approach. A woman as the head of a fresh patriotic movement—yes, the time had come, but Hardenberg would hold the reins firmly. The BFP, the LEAGUE OF FREE PATRIOTS, had fully met the needs of the modern era; everyone involved felt this—and, above all, the polls confirmed this. Now it was a matter of getting the BFP's statesmanlike goals across to the people—both ordinary and sophisticated—in order to implement them with promising party-political success.

An influential and Germanophile Scandinavian multi-millionaire, who became a member of the alternative party and brought with him his considerable North Germanic fortune, would also contribute to this. Frank Hühn, the new candidate for membership in the order, would serve his brilliant wife highly valued in the background, as he once did with Hardenberg. His wife admired the head of the order and was willing to obey him and serve the fatherland with all her strength.

The fateful year was gradually drawing to a close; the winter solstice had already been a week ago. After her parachute jump accident and paraplegia, Sigrun Freytag had become an expert in computer science, and now she could finally apply her knowledge of information technology to the benefit of the house. Sven Hardenberg was the father of her son and the great love of her life, but he was also a master of the order, that she had supported all her life—and she would continue to support it, just as she would serve her master, against everything and everyone. Sigrun took over the communications center and network work for Hardenberg; her ground-floor premises were equipped accordingly, the high-tech equipment was of the uppermost quality, and the mainframe computer in the burglar-proof basement was largely self-sufficient. All the imperative information converged with Sigrun, and she had a talent for distilling it all down to a single point and then presenting it concisely and succinctly to the master of the house. Through this responsibility and Hardenberg's trust, she felt whole again—she wanted to cover Sven's striking face with kisses every day, but she held back knowing they would probably never have a relationship like that again.

Thore had settled in quickly, as only children can. When Sigrun looked at her son, she basked in his joy and happiness. The children loved each other, and Viktoria was never a burden to her brother; he was always protective in front of, behind, or beside her. Both children adored their father; one word from him and

the little ones beamed with bliss. They all formed a kind of family community, including Sunja, Geithe, and the ever-caring Mrs. Anders. And if Sven were to find a new companion one day, Sigrun would accept that woman as well, as a sign of true devotion. She and Sven had talked about the years they were apart. He learned everything from her—every last detail. She learned of his dreams and his wishes, of his successes and failures, of his tragedies and his disappointments ... Sigrun Freytag bravely endured the torments of Tantalus, cultivated her great longing with a stoic attitude, would never abandon her only love and would support him forever—for the good of her son, but also for the good of her heart and the salvation of her soul!

ooooo

Michael Kaufmann, a doctor of law and until today exempt from service as a public prosecutor in Berlin, couldn't understand the world. How could they suspect him? Him, a well-known advocate for the strictest professional ethics? Him, who had supported the failed introduction of religious education as an elective subject? Where did he stand now? Before the citizens for whose justice, protection, and freedom he stood up? Before his superiors, the courts, or the media? Before himself and his conscience? But which conscience exactly? Hadn't he done it? One of the most heinous things a person could do? Yes, he had done it, even if he never wanted or could admit it to himself—he lived the personal lie until it threatened to crush him.

The year had barely begun, and already it was screwed—deeply and painfully screwed. He rarely had such crude thoughts at his workplace, but the situation called for primitive instincts similar to those of his own perverse urges. In October of last year, Senior Public Prosecutor Dr. Michael Kaufmann was provisionally removed from office; an indictment and conviction "in the name of the people" seemed inevitable. His world was falling apart, his own agency, the public prosecutor's office, was investigating him.

Kaufmann was accused of belonging to an influential circle of Europe-wide pedophiles. In the spring of that same year, a Social Democratic Party (SPD) politician had foolishly spilled the beans and ruined everything. At the time, the judicial civil servant assumed it wouldn't be long before he was exposed, but the initial suspicions against him could not be substantiated. By September, however, red flags appeared everywhere. Kaufmann's personal computer was confiscated and analyzed on the orders of the Attorney General, whose office was just a few doors down. Kaufmann's own investigators had the *honor* of the execution. Now he could bury all his dreams of a judgeship.

He spent his then business-free days at home, and his already desolate relationship with his frigid wife became unbearable for both of them. They hadn't had anything to say to each other for years and were barely keeping up appearances. Marital tenderness was a foreign word—the powerful prosecutor who loved to persecute “disdainful neo-Nazis” in the mainstream media, was a henpecked husband in his own home, prone to irritability and anxiety. His two adult children despised him, having long since broken their fatherly chains. They all endured the holidays together only with much repression and alcohol. His only pleasure in the last three years was his youthful lover in Berlin-Lichtenberg, who exploited her sugar daddy financially for a few hours of feigned attention each month. When Silke met up with her girlfriends or her athletic *full-time lover*, they invariably laughed at the impotence-impaired “bigheaded West German” with the fat belly and thick hair on his back.

His lawyers had filed an urgent motion against the forced release with the competent administrative court, as the public prosecutor's office was unable to substantiate the new suspicions. Shortly before Christmas, the dismissed civil servant received notice that his suspension had been lifted—he was to resume his duties after the end of the current year. Now everything would be all-

right again; he would curb the demons in his loins, leave his part-time lover, save his family life ... and then everything would turn out the way he had always dreamed it would in quiet moments, when he obsessively imagined himself to be sane or even *normal*.

The prosecutor buried his face in his hands and rested his elbows on the large worktop. Numerous files lay scattered on the floor, which he had swept from the desk minutes earlier in a fit of rage. The pictures, which had been in an unmarked envelope, lay lined up in front of him. He had no idea how the large envelope got there, but its contents made him tremble. This 4 January was cold, but that didn't explain his current pale state. It was the first Monday of the new year, and it should have been a fresh beginning—instead, he was losing the last of the rotten ground beneath his feet. He looked at the middle shot: he was lying naked on a dingy bed in a dilapidated apartment, next to him a boy and a girl—wearing only naked fear on their faces. Whether the children were eight, nine, or ten years old, he didn't know; he hadn't asked at the time, just as he never had. Behind the camera had been a former colleague and fellow activist who died under mysterious circumstances a week ago.

Kaufmann was startled when his cellular phone rang; the number was withheld, caller ID was apparently enabled. Habitually, his hand reached for his mobile phone, and he answered it, completely beside himself.

"Uh, yes...please?"

"Well, you child fucker, are you shitting your panties yet?"

"Who... who is it?"

"This is Sven Hardenberg! You once had me convicted as an *malicious right-wing extremist*, but most importantly, you barred me from attending my parents' and my grandmother's funeral. Remember, you depraved piece of shit?"

The portly senior prosecutor began to sweat profusely, his body trembling—yes, oh yes, he remembered, his imposing victory over the well-known 'extremist' had been his breakthrough in the national media, the biggest building block for his nationwide *prominence*.

"Yes, I think ... uh, yes, I remember, but what ..."

"Shut up and listen carefully: You're a sick pig, fucking little children and trying to act like a Mr. Clean to the outside world. The pictures you received are photocopies. The Attorney General, the authorities, your lawyers, and your wife have also received copies. It could be a matter of minutes before they come for you. They're already waiting for you in prison, where they'll rip your degenerate ass open to your throat, and when you scream for mercy and pass out, the nice guys will wait, piss in your face, and start all over again. You have only one choice: Take your service weapon from the bottom right drawer of your desk, stick it in your child-desecrating mouth, and pull the trigger ... you have 30 seconds, you perverted cunt!"

The reception was gone, Kaufmann could hardly breathe—everything was lost, simply everything. Yet he felt somehow liberated, as if in a trance ... removed and floating. There was a loud knock at his door; he had locked himself in after discovering the photos. He knew his arrest was imminent. He had ordered this himself often enough, knew the officers carrying out the order were agitated and tense, and felt the hunter's excitement through the office door. He took his gun from the drawer, loaded it, and then held the increasingly heavy pistol to his sweat-drenched temple, but was too cowardly to pull the trigger. He would go on living, pathetic and small—there was no way he could judge himself!

The door shattered, and the summoned LKA state police officers, all of whom just happened to be members of Hardenberg's "Rittmeister Group," ambitiously stormed the office of the child molester they deeply despised, the photographs of the atrocity they

had seen earlier that morning still fresh in their minds. The "suspect" had a weapon in his right hand and was trying to conceal unidentifiable notes on the desk with his left. The muzzle of the pistol swung toward the honorable law enforcement detectives, and the two in front quickly raised their service weapons ... It was too late for warning.

Senior Public Prosecutor Dr. Michael Kaufmann died in a hail of bullets from the avengers, and none of those involved would ever regret the solution to this disgusting "case."

"It testifies once again to the ambivalent extremity of my spirit that my desire to love is becoming more pronounced just now, when I want to take up the sword of vengeance for Germany."

Victory or Death

Adelheid Freytag desperately wanted to return to Germany; Bavaria was her former homeland, and Sven Hardenberg was perfectly happy with this wish. Adelheid would now serve as the lady of the house of the completely modernized and expanded estate in the breathtaking Berchtesgadener Land region. Dagmarhall was even more beautiful than before; Dr. Mende and his team had done a wonderful job. As requested by the new master of the order, the exterior facade remained rather modest, albeit high-grade.

The security measures were barely noticeable to the untrained eye; only the solid wooden fence and the impenetrable hedges were higher than before. Few hikers would have guessed that every corner of the property was equipped with surveillance cameras and infrared sensors. The living and working areas of the property, on the other hand, were truly lavishly yet gracefully furnished: as far as the eye could see, one could see the finest stone from various German regions, the finest woods, open fireplaces, and opulent furnishings—the five-star German kitchen could have fed a company. Dagmarhall radiated all the unique dignity of its namesake—Hardenberg was deeply moved at the small handover of the keys ceremony after the renovation. Everyone present felt the same. The caretaker couple were brimming with pride, and some guards even approached the majordomo Geithe with the request to be deployed there more often.

Sigrun's sister would supervise the old and new staff, coordinate vacations, plan and supervise seminars, and she would ensure that the master and his family could always find time to relax. The owner had allowed her to use the previous owner's study, provided it remained largely unchanged. She would gladly keep

this promise, for it made her happy, filled her with warmth, and often with tears, to sit in the chair of the man she had once loved so much, and in fact still did.

Hardenberg knew nothing of her intimate relationship with Hans Rittmeister, and the former chief secretary was convinced that it wasn't necessary. She loved this kind of work; it satisfied her to manage, economize, and organize, as she once had with her esteemed boss, Justus Birkle. She wanted to be *needed*, and she was required here—for that reason alone, she would do anything to serve Hardenberg and the order, but also because Sven treated her adored, fate-battered sister so decently and kindly. Indeed, Adelheid Freytag would never forget the principled actions of this noble gentleman.

The order's Spanish finca, which the order's master for Western Europe now also possessed, was to become a instruction center, training facility, and retirement home for Hardenberg's security detail and bodyguards. Here, his men could also train and exchange ideas with other security forces of various order heads, as each of the thirteen masters owned such a Bavarian country estate in the general vicinity. Nevertheless, Sven Hardenberg did not trust the order and would never forget that it had ordered the killing of his parents and grandmother. He would dominate THE COMING ONES, use them, shape them, but never completely submit to them, for submission was not in his nature.

Hardenberg's independent, unfettered mobility was essential, which is why he had to quickly pursue two acquisitions: a yacht, so he could cross the oceans if necessary, and an aircraft to ensure the greatest possible independence in the air. A renowned shipyard was quickly found, as Germany built the best ships. And at LUFTHANSA—the globally respected experts in the fitting-out of exquisite business jets—he received a substantial offer for a brand-new jet, which had been ordered by a global player in the

insurance industry but never picked up due to bankruptcy. Since only a down payment had been made, the aircraft was not part of the bankruptcy estate—and now, after a few personal changes at the request of the master of the order, it would soon be in Hardenberg's possession. A suitable crew had to be found quickly, and Wolfram Glowania's law firm had been commissioned to organize pilot courses and maritime training courses for several of the boss's men.

The overall situation for Hardenberg, for the order, and for all like-minded people would get harder before it got better—not only in Germany, but also in the rest of the First World. Those in power would defend the ruins of their rule with brittle teeth and blunt claws and fight those who rebelled with every conceivable and unimaginable means. The resistance fighters' motto was self-sufficient structures: free, sovereign, and with the broken chains of post-war slavery always as a weapon in their hands.

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"Are you sure? It's him?"

"Yes—absolutely, Major! He was one of those who tried to kill our master after his release from prison in Berlin. When I blocked the intersection with the truck, he jumped out of the van, chased after the boss, and fired a few more shots at him. He was quickly picked up by his men—otherwise I would have finished him off back then—but I remembered his face. Even when we were in Frankfurt last summer, I recognized him—it's him, one hundred percent."

"Then number is up, we'll take him out ... and his fellow worshippers as well," Lars Geithe said to Jan Lessing, picking up the cell phone to call *her*. She was sitting in the ladies' restroom of a cocktail bar in Frankfurt's upscale district—it was just before 7 p.m. Her name was Vanadis, after the Germanic goddess Freyja, but her victim would never know that—they never did.

She was instructed to choose a table by the glass front, as she would be observed by the client. It wasn't a special assignment; the only unusual thing was that she wasn't supposed to kill the target, but only stun him to facilitate interrogation. She had managed to run into him by *chance* three days ago. He had immediately taken the bait, probably thinking in his complacency that fate had once again planned a fleeting affair for him. She let him believe it and allowed him to write down her requested phone number. Only a short time later, he called and arrogantly asked if he could invite her.

She toyed with him, acted insecure, and then that morning on the phone, she let him *win* her. He mumbled about an appointment he had that night, but she made it clear: It's now or never! 6:00 p.m. would suit him. He picked her up from her home in a show off limousine with shiny summer tires, despite the remaining winter snow in late March—well, hardly her home, just a penthouse rented for two weeks with direct elevator access. He looked good, confident of victory; the dark gray suit, the striking purple tie, and his neat, short hair made him seem almost respectable, trustworthy even.

When she suggested he go to her place after two mixed drinks and a call from her client, he looked at her with a smile, then immediately checked his watch—she wasn't sure whether he wanted to calculate how much time he could *spare* for her, or whether he wanted to let her know that it was about time she succumbed to his assumed charm and charisma. When they both arrived at her lodgings, he had to sit down—he wasn't feeling well. Before the mark could become suspicious, she opened her blouse and, massaging her magnificent breasts, presented them. The target smiled stupidly to himself. Then it was the turn of the business skirt, which she slowly let slide to the floor with circular movements of her pelvis. He gazed at the beauty eagerly. She thought she saw a thread of saliva dripping onto his jacket in the by twi-

light conquered apartment ... and then a dark dream enveloped him, while the dangerous blond spider straightened its clothes and didn't give him another look.

"Wake up!" There was a loud crack, but he could barely feel the violent slap.

"Damn it, wake up!" There was another bang, and his sensations intensified. Two more brutal slaps landed on his face, and his eyes popped open.

"What ..."

"Snout!"

"Who ..."

The fist hit him hard, his lips swelled; now he didn't want to say anything more, his throat was dry, he couldn't swallow—fear inevitably spread through him. He lay on a large bed, his upper body restrained. His chest, hands, and neck were secured with leather straps that had been attached to the bed frame. Two men stood above him, and he could make out at least two more in the periphery of his vision. They were all armed, masked, and wearing black combat fatigues, including bulletproof vests. One of the two men above him was pressing a syringe that was still stuck in his arm. The feeling of an oppressive fog seemed to lift from him; he became clear. Damn, what was going on? Where was he? How long had he been out of it?

"We know who you are. We know what you're doing. We need some information—maybe you'll survive this."

"Information? What kind of information? Hey, just let me go, then we can talk." The fist hit him again, and he threatened to lose consciousness. The men were serious; this wasn't a game—now he was almost panicking.

"Oh, by the way, where did you leave your foreskin?" The forty-year-old heard laughter in the darkness. He sensed, his tormentors weren't Jew-haters, he knew the difference; they simply

wanted to provoke and unsettle him—a familiar interrogation tactic, something he also knew. He realized he was naked. Naked, bound, and unarmed. He had clearly imagined the evening differently. Now he wished he'd accepted the offered position as an instructor in Israel.

After an assassination mission in Berlin, for which he was responsible for planning, had failed over four and a half years earlier, the intelligence agency had dismissed him from active service. The defeat at the hands of an unarmed, defenseless, unsuspecting target had taken a psychological toll on him; this "Nazi terrorist" was supposed to be a straightforward task—approach, headshot, and extraction. But the freshly released German, code-named "Alt-Siegfried," a mocking creation of the MOSSAD, had managed to escape, and the dangerous espionage organization was more than displeased.

At least his superiors offered him the option of either returning to his homeland as an instructor or transferring to the administration of the secret service and being assigned to the main residence in Frankfurt am Main. He stayed in Germany because he had always known one thing: desert sand, sweltering heat, religious zealots, and an unfashionable little kippah for his itchy scalp were not his world. He was certainly a proud Jew, but primarily from afar—one could also worship the starry sky without immediately wanting to become an astronaut.

"Well, boy, you've been head of the MOSSAD residency for almost a year now, you've clearly worked your way up. There's a big meeting of all MOSSAD and METSADA agents there at midnight. You probably wanted to make a quick *excursion* to a hot girl's house—but that's not going to happen, as you can see." More quiet, albeit strained, laughter in the room.

"How ..."

"How do we know all this? Our master told us, and he also told us who you are. We have only one question: What do we need to get into the residency?"

"It's too well guarded. If you try, the guards will blow everything up and half the neighborhood will go up in flames."

And again the fist—it crashed hard into his jaw, his mouth filled with blood and the taste of the glove lining. He breathed faster, fear taking a real hold of him. He felt sick. He'd never experienced anything like this before. He'd killed many people, but with his PSG1. He hated physical violence, and it discouraged him.

"What do we need?"

"My ... my ID, it's also a chip card for gate and house entry ..."
His right hand was grabbed and held tight.

"We already have the card. What else do we need? Maybe a password?"

"Nothing more," stammered the prisoner, who felt sick and like vomiting.

"I think so... but we don't have time to play with you. I really hate doing this. We need your thumbprint for entry ..."

The ringleader untied a shackle and yanked up the restrained hand. He bent the captured spy's thumb outward; the resident chief could barely resist. He heard a machine operating in the room, and before he could scream, one of the captors severed the prepared limb from his large paw with a jigsaw. The spy leader bucked wildly, losing half his palm. One of the torturers stuffed a kneadable substance into his mouth, which opened in a burning scream.

"Well, you won't be murdering anyone with that hand anymore; your time as a state-subsidized assassin is over. I'd like to say it wasn't personal—but I'm afraid it was. *Shalomchen!*" The

order's warriors, commissioned by Geithe and Lessing, quietly cleared the apartment and left the beautiful assassin behind.

She had received her money—which she stowed in her luggage—in cash from the leader of the commandos. She urgently needed to shower, to feel clean. She wasn't afraid that the prisoner might break free; bondage was her specialty—and her passion. Everything had been wiped down, and without vinyl gloves, she barely touched anything. She treated herself to one last glass of wine; soft music was playing in the background, barely audible. The cold rain that had begun to pour sounded so beautiful as it pounded on the roof of the rented flat, and the doomed enemy in the adjoining room seemed unreal and meaningless to her, like the deceptive nightmares of childhood, barely remembered, but whose subconscious haunting in old age could be worse than suffering and death.

"What time is it ...?" croaked the captured assassin and secret agent. She had gone into his room as planned, but, contrary to her instructions, had removed the cloth from his mouth.

"Quarter to twelve." The face of her costly watch glowed in the dark.

"Could I have something to drink? Please ...?"

She sat down hesitantly and vigilantly next to him on the double bed and mercifully poured water from a bottle on the side table. He drank it hastily and gratefully. She stood up, ready to leave. Her travel bag and cosmetic case were packed, her work almost done. She would enter the room only once more to confirm his death, which she would immediately communicate by phone.

"You dirty Nazi slut!" He was desperate, frantic; there had to be some chance for him to survive. Maybe he could intimidate her, maybe she didn't realize who she was dealing with ...

"Nazi slut? Now, now, just a few hours ago, you were so polite, eloquent, and courteous?" She laughed softly, mockingly.

"And how is this to be understood? All women who throw themselves at your feet are sluts, but someone like me, blonde, blue-eyed, and immune to your allures, must be a Nazi slut? God, how pathetic ... I'd rather be a Nazi slut than have to spread my legs for you."

Damn, his wound still ached and bled profusely. He wanted to get his hands on this magnificent Mata Hari clone, tear out her long, wonderfully fragrant hairs one by one, gouge out her self-important eyes, and peel her Nordic skin from her body. How stupid, how unspeakably stupid he had been to fall into such a trap. Why did he once again have to think with his dick instead of his well-developed head? That was probably the eternal, sometimes fatal fortune of all men ... He struggled to keep his composure, unwilling to give up without a fight.

"You have no idea who I am, my people will hunt you down, torture you, kill your family, and cause you endless suffering ..."

"Yes, yes, I know who you are. You're no different than me; you kill for money. The only difference is, you think you're doing it for a good cause, but your cause is bestial. I, at least, admit that I kill for money, but only when the job convinces me—when I heard who you were, I gladly accepted the contract."

"I am with the MOSSAD, section chief in Germany, and I was commissioned by my country ..." He tried to straighten up, but in vain; his deliberately unyielding body language therefore did not achieve the intended effect.

"Stop talking so much nonsense! Commissioned? You're a paid assassin with a dubious free pass from a more than shady government ... in the service of a state? Just hearing that makes me want to puke!"

She gagged him again, everything was said, well, almost everything—there was one more thing she had to tell him.

"When you were unconscious, they poisoned you. At midnight, you will die ... and so will everyone who worked for you." She

turned her back on him and started to leave the bedroom. Then, as if she had just remembered something else, she paused in the doorway but didn't turn back.

"Oy vey, I'm supposed to give you one last greeting from a man I would never want as an enemy: His name is Sven Hardenberg, and he tells you, '*inter arma enim silent leges*!'—in a time of war there are no laws, or something like that. I was told you'd be able to relate to that ..."

Jenny, as Vanadis Ottilie Vandenburg conspiratorially called herself during the current assignment, irrevocably closed the door behind her. She no longer saw the suddenly very old professional open his bloodshot eyes in terrible remembrance and certainty, while his blood slowly turned into a deadly, flesh-consuming acid that would cause him unimaginable pain.

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In the hour in which the ghosts came crawling out to play, the Israeli secret service's foreign headquarters in Frankfurt am Main was completely wiped out. Agents, scribes, and personnel, male and female, all died in the hail of bullets from the attackers and avengers—some only after a coup de grâce. Two of the armed assailants were injured, one fatally—he was released on the spot by his comrades.

The house on the outskirts of the Hessian city was ablaze as the retribution commandos began their orderly retreat. The decision was difficult for those in charge, but survival was at stake. The action would cause a great stir, but the master of the order had bought himself time, because the enemy would need a long period to recover from the blow and become active again in Germany, or so he hoped.

By then, The COMING ONES would be prepared, and their leader resolved to do everything possible to keep a foreign secret service that murdered dissident, critical, and inconvenient citizens away from Germany and, one day, to drive it out of all of Europe.

Hardenberg felt great sadness and grief over the sheer amount of blood that had been shed. The operation was filmed by members of the commando unit. The head of the order, his majordomo, who was not allowed to participate on the orders of the master, and the guest of the house, the Iranian informant Ahmed, looked intently at the monitors in the operations room of the Hardenberg villa and followed the live feed.

None of them took pleasure in the terrible, ominous events—the mayhem was pure necessity. Only Sigrun, who technically monitored the transmission, showed no outward emotion, only harshness. Anyone who threatened her family, her home, and her reality deserved no pity.

Hardenberg, an altruistic friend of all cultural Jews, did not want war with them or with any other living being, but if “Zionists,” as they called themselves, threatened his life and, above all, terrorized the life of his family, the order, and his fatherland, then he would fight them as he would fight any aggressor, regardless of their ancestry, religion, or principles.

The new master of the order was by no means a racist, nor an anti-Semite; he knew this in his heart, but his worldview was always deliberately tainted with this stigma. He had given up repeatedly denying the degrading, desecrating accusation that he was an “inhumane neo-Nazi”—a hopeless battle against windmills. If his enemies felt better about themselves through such provocative defamations, if they needed this tarnishing of his reputation as legitimacy to take action against him, then fine—he

himself would under no circumstances indulge in or submit to such behavior.

Sven Hardenberg acted out of love for his country, his homeland, never out of hatred toward others simply because they were exotic or alien. If the master of the order detested someone, it was solely because they posed a threat to his future and his existence. And, unfortunately, there were plenty of those.

In the Eye of the Storm

The attack in Frankfurt caused great excitement, but the responsible governmental body, the STANDING CONFERENCE OF INTERIOR MINISTERS AND SENATORS OF THE STATES, imposed a far-reaching news blackout, so that the mass media reported exclusively on a "tragic fire with numerous deaths"—employees of the BUNDESPRESSEAMT, THE Federal Press Office, who were sympathetic to the master of the order contributed to making the reporting blockade impermeable.

The commandos of the order initially went into hiding, while Geithe received orders to tighten security at the Hardenberg estate and the immediate surroundings. Dagmarhall had also been placed on alert—the order and its members were prepared for the adversary's relentless thirst for revenge, although Hardenberg suspected that the enemy's current logistics would no longer be sufficient to strike back quickly. But he was aware that he had only won one battle; the war against his fatherland's foes was still to come.

Intelligence committees and security bodies from numerous countries convened both nationally and internationally to discuss the situation. The COMING ONES were introduced to the officially cleared secret bearers of these special consultations, and distrust was sown. The briefings caused general astonishment, as hardly anyone was familiar with the term, let alone with the suspicious secret order.

The cat was now out of the bag, at least within confidential government circles—Hardenberg was aware of that. His name had been mentioned in connection with the onslaught, and the order was no longer completely *hidden*.

Nevertheless, Sven was willing to pay this price for the safety of his clan and his mentality. The Israelis elegantly kept a distance, as they had often done in the past: *Unsere Leit* (Yiddish for "our people") had been attacked, sacred blood was shed, and the intelligence agencies of other nations were expected to push ahead with the investigations and, above all, the appropriate response. Nevertheless, the BND, CIA, NSA, MI6, and other services largely failed to respond.

At first, the speculation was that terrorist perpetrators from abroad were involved. The "Department of Intelligence" (ST) of the FEDERAL CRIMINAL POLICE OFFICE (BKA) in Wiesbaden took over the investigation on behalf of the FEDERAL PROSECUTOR GENERAL and deliberately refused to allow anyone else, with the exception of the BfV, the FEDERAL OFFICE FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE CONSTITUTION, to interfere—particularly because they had received hardly any qualified information from the intelligence services for years. The highest police authority in the Federal Republic of Germany preferred to take responsibility itself.

This could only be a good thing for the BKA, as the extremist government of Israel was more than just a thorn in the side of the German government. The BND had received unofficial instructions from the Federal Chancellery to cooperate only loosely with the MOSSAD, and then only if Germany's interests were preserved. The US intelligence agencies, the CIA and NSA, were remarkably understanding, even downright perceptive, in this regard. Since the supposedly liberal United States President Barack Hussein Obama II took office, the Federal Republic of Germany's leash had been held surprisingly loose—but the collar remained tight, because even a black head of state would not be allowed to be *that* liberal and unprejudiced toward the former "Nazi Germany."

Nevertheless, the global economic crisis and the renewed power struggle among the ruling powers had changed general perspec-

tives worldwide, values were redefined, and the time for a new beginning, a reawakening had come. The only question that remained was where the journey would lead. Hardenberg and his followers knew the ultimate goal and would achieve it—or inevitably go down with flags flying.

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The Hardenbergs' daily routine continued, and the long-awaited summer was fast approaching. The upcoming FIFA WORLD CUP in South Africa was set to begin on 11 June, and football fan Hardenberg was already looking forward to exciting matches with his friends and his men in front of the private cinema screen.

The excitement of the past few months had subsided somewhat, although the danger for everyone was still acute—but life went on, and the powerful master of the order had long ago decided not to be afraid and not to spend his life isolated behind thick walls and fortifications of barbed wire. He had been locked up once, and this would never happen again.

As a young man in the energetic city of Hamburg, he had never allowed others to restrict his freedom of movement. He didn't avoid dangerous neighborhoods; this was his country, and he would not allow dark figures to deny him access. Even now, he would never tolerate the enemy restricting his quality of life. Security was certainly not neglected, but he intended, without dread or anxiety, to show his beloved daughter and his new son the splendors of the world and the wonders of his homeland.

Yes, Sven loved his native land: the land of naysayers and complainers, so tragic, so *Faustian*—with its fickle people trapped in Teutonic melancholy. But it was also the land of poets and academics, a superior, rational-romantic essence of contradictoriness. The German people would have the capacity for greater things, for highest spheres, if only they recognized their true

strengths—had the courage to free themselves from the scourge of imperishable self-hatred, despair, feelings of inferiority, and unspeakable mediocrity. Yes, then, and only then, would the Germans be almighty gods, for, as the Italian philosopher and natural mystic Giordano Bruno wrote in the 16th century: Divine is the spirit of this German people!

Friedrich Steiner would soon be released on two-thirds of his sentence; his position with Hardenberg in Berlin was secure. The head of the order was already looking forward to the old man, who had successfully completed his *Abitur* (prep school diploma) in the Hamburg correctional facility and was continuing his higher education as a *Gasthörer* or guest student at the Hagen Distance Learning University. Fritz was to become the new coordinator and head of the entire GERMANIC BROTHERHOOD, particularly as a relief for the extremely important and busy majordomo. It was planned, that he should take over Geithe's duties: supervising the prison leaders and members of the GB, providing financial and social assistance with releases and reintegration, and selecting the best fighters from their ranks for Hardenberg's security services and arranging for their extensive training.

The Glowania law firm was also tasked with securing Alexander Herzog's timely release. The "crusher" would have been free long ago, had he behaved well, if not for two more convictions for assault while in prison—but now it was enough. Hardenberg had ordered physical restraint through his lawyer, because there was life outside the prison walls—anyone who had been in chains for too long began to love their seemingly soothing clanging in a treacherously obsessive way.

The deceptive calm could not deceive anyone in Hardenberg's inner circle. It was only a matter of time before the world court of doomsday convened and the final battle would begin. Sven's bodyguards occasionally sought out small skirmishes in Berlin's

nightlife. Promising *Ansagen*, verbal challenges, were readily available not only in *multicultural* Kreuzberg, and the wish of the combative elite troops was granted. Gangs of foreigners, leftist punks, red-light district bikers, and "hooligans" provided the necessary and highly willing training partners, because the guards could not be allowed to get soft and had to be prepared for anything. After-ward, they usually shook hands and left the place of clash satisfied. As long as everything remained within limits, the head of the order had a basic understanding.

Forced marches and orientation hikes with assault packs in the Grunewald forest and the surrounding area at night were also on the duty roster for all sentries. Curious passersby were met without greeting, but nevertheless without hostility. Lars Geithe, Sven's security chief, usually led them; the 34-year-old "major" was still as tough as Krupp steel.

Hardenberg rarely went with them anymore, contenting himself with the weight room and the ergometer. He was slowly feeling his aging body, and he now had a small, well-earned prosperity belly—but hardly anyone noticed or wanted to notice it. Sven valued his ambition differently than before. However, anyone who made the mistake of underestimating him, whether friend or foe, would have a rude awakening.

***“We are all a product of our experiences and
live from the shadow of our memories!”***

Red Sunset

After the lavish supper that Saturday evening with the extended family, the master sat elatedly in his study, with a list of possible gifts for his princess, whose birthday was just over two weeks away. Viktoria Wilhelmine's fourth birthday on 21 June was to be a magnificent celebration—"with all the trimmings," as the little *doll* always liked to emphasize. When Hardenberg was finished, he stroked his freshly shaved head several times, which, tanned by the strong spring sun, shimmered strikingly. His hand casually touched his smooth, stubble-free, masculine face, which seemed surprisingly youthful in the dim light of the sky parlor ...

He had lined up his order's insignia on the large worktable and gazed at them contemplatively. Hardenberg occasionally took the three gold-decorated figures from his safe and tried to fathom their mysteries. None of his men had ever seen them, not even Geithe, his steadfast majordomo. Perhaps one day he would show them to his children, possibly only to his son ... but he would probably never let his offspring share in them—they should not have to endure what he had to endure. His house and his affairs were in order, his dynasty was established and protected, and his line would seize the future. Heimdall's mighty call was heard—and this battle of the gods would not be lost!

His thoughts were racing; he needed to find peace, to clear his head. He needed the security and reassurance that only a human being could provide. Sven Hardenberg set out for his wife's grave beneath the glorious beech family plants. Even today, he spoke with his beloved Dagmar almost daily. For this purpose, he had an ornate wooden bench placed at the foot of her grave—beneath this old oak tree, which majestically guarded his treasured companion, his late wife. There was never a lack of fresh

flowers. Dagmar was a part of his life, so he told her about little Viktoria Wilhelmine—every impulse, every step forward, every event. She should experience what he experienced with his idolized daughter, and no other human being would ever be able to take on her sacred role—his dearest Dagmar would always remain "Minchen's" mother.

His burden in life was leaden, so enormous and unspeakably gigantic—he needed his deceased wife as a "soul spittoon," as she called her cherished role during her lifetime. The master of the order told her everything, sought her advice, and had to visibly sense her presence. Often he could feel her hands on his head, on his shoulders, on his body ... he emptied his soul, something he could only dare to do with her. Hardenberg lived through their life together with Dagmar, the life they actually had and the life they could have had. Every now and then, loneliness and abandonment overwhelmed him, and occasionally Sven shed an imperceptible, desperate tear—only for her ... and only in the protection of secret seclusion.

He looked at his chronometer; it was just after 9 p.m. He wanted to go back inside to give the children a goodnight kiss; they were surely already waiting for him, ready for bed. Then he saw it ... on his chest. He wasn't even surprised, just a little astonished, because the time didn't seem *right*. He remained motionless; escape was futile; professionals in rigid, fortified positions could hit even a moving target. His pulse hadn't increased one bit.

The dot on his anthracite suit jacket seemed blood red. He slowly looked up and was briefly blinded. Was the telescope's laser aiming device being adjusted one last time? Was the fatal hit coming now? He could summon his bodyguards, but that would be too late; he didn't want to endanger them as well—may the inevitable sword of Damocles strike cleanly and swiftly ...

When he realized the reality, he exhaled quietly: It wasn't an assassination attempt, but merely a lost ray of the setting sun, bravely finding its last path through the large trees on the park-like grounds to his heart.

The steadfast lord of the manor looked up to the sky; a reddened, cloudless horizon in the evening is usually the harbinger of a beautiful day—whether it would also be a prophecy for the future remained to be seen.

In the depths of his winged soul, Sven Ansgar Hardenberg did not believe in fate, nor in a supernatural providence, but in the noble will of his spirit, in the titanic strength of his physique and in the deep trust in his long, chosen path, which was paved with the ashes of countless burned bridges, making turning back impossible, truly unmanageable.

As if reborn, the tall man strode across his own patch of land into the house with stoic composure, a smile on his lips. His guards, who hadn't noticed anything, smiled with him, glad to see their boss happy and enlightened. He nodded to his men in a friendly manner.

Arriving at the patio door, Sven Hardenberg turned smoothly one last time and absorbed the graceful scenery—tomorrow, he would spontaneously take the entire household troops away for a few days, he had just decided.

He firmly resolved to enjoy every minute of life; it could be over so quickly. But he would triumph over inevitable death; it wasn't transient, it was invincible, it simply had to be, oh yes, the master of the order simply had to believe that, for so many relied on him—he would have to bear the weight of this crushing burden for a long, infinitely long time to come ...

Not far from the estate lay two sniper commandos, a so-called hit squad. A gunman and an observer—excellently camouflaged, experts in their deadly profession. They hadn't received the expected order; the *why* was not their concern. A kill order was only carried out on command.

The target had apparently been lucky. It didn't matter to them. They waited motionless until the order to withdraw silently was given. They might come back, but that was up to others—because in their line of work, orders always came from *others*.

Epilogue—The Ring

He stood at a small round table in the hidden study, flanked on both sides by two brothers. He was their undisputed leader. To an outsider, the gray-haired scholars would seem like oddballs: they were distinguished by purity of morals, piety and a long life span.

They were five—never more ... never less.

"Aldebarans," "Lemurians," "Atlanteans," "Aryan Rishis," "Vril-Ya," "Priests of the Rosicrucians" or "Gray Eminences of the German Gentlemen's Club"—there were many definitions and interpretations from outside, but only very few initiates and knowing were aware of their actual species. The literary works about the incredible existence of their noble race gathered dust unnoticed, and in the fast-moving age of the *fun society* with its egoistic self-realization and superficial attitude to the meaning of life, powerful phantom guardians became mere childish figments of the imagination.

The five old Hyperboreans bent over a large, spread-out map of Antarctica, which their company had received from a mysterious baron, the notorious Freiherr von Sebottendorf. The map was unique and inestimably valuable, because only it showed the portal to the impregnable bulwark of a Shangri-La for selected Northmen. A new secret expedition to *Neuschwabenland* (New Swabia) was planned; the time of the uprising of the *Invisibles* was now approaching with rapid, unstoppable strides.

The conspiratorial men were the powerful and only members of an occult secret society: DER RING. The brotherhood was older than humanity, and its knowledge came from another, a higher

celestial sphere—it came from the realm of the *Invisibles*, an imperceptible community of species that had lived hidden deep in the hollow earth for so long that they themselves hardly suspected anything of their true origin.

The leader of the Circle of Five, who also served as a member of the ORDER OF THE COMING ONES and as a member of the staff of the secret society's protocol service, was the modest administrator of that villa on the island of Schwanenwerder in the Berlin district of Nikolassee—he was exceptionally inconspicuous and for many years had been able to conceal the power within him from the outside world. However, when it was unleashed, his power was like that of a hurricane.

Like most of the brothers of the order, he was very fond of Sven Hardenberg. He had briefly greeted the new, auspicious master before his initiation ritual. He knew that this German warrior would lead the order into a new era. If Hardenberg failed, however, the order would undoubtedly be finished, but THE RING would be the constant of another society—as it always was: a secret order within a secret order.

The nameless members of the life fellowship of THE RING, the mighty secret wardens of the resurrected, legendary, redeeming Reich, waited, saw, recorded, acted and were ready since the beginning of time—untouchable, ruthless and determined.

The arcanum of the magical, sidereal primal force called VRIL, the cosmic natural mystery of this ancient brotherhood, was hidden in the insignia of each master—very few were ever able to decipher the riddle. The old head of the order in Western Europe, Kurt Steinbauer, had succeeded in doing so with great admiration—but too late. The weak, sickly flesh of the human race had consumed him and thus rendered him useless.

Sven Hardenberg, the new, illustrious master of a powerful brotherhood, who has already been whispered the title "Father Thurisaz" by members of the order, would be the right man for the elite, all-powerful circle of THE RING ... as soon a place in the circle of five would be free—but first the supposed *savior* and *liberator* would have to win many battles. Timely redemption was only conceivable if he stayed alive.

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And what about the secret order DIE KOMMENDEN—THE COMING ONES? The opaque alliance that had operated underground for so long and now wanted to organize and determine the fate of the world instead of just influencing it? ... The order is on the rise.

They come inexorably... first softly as if on doves' feet, silent as secret thoughts in the darkness, discreet like the tears of the deaf and dumb ... then of course powerful like a winged dragon in a nosedive—fire-breathing, noisy and destructive.

They had been there for such a long time—and have remained undiscovered ...

They are present—but hardly anyone notices them ...

Their flaming age is soon at hand—like the violent awakening of a sleeping giant.

THE END

"It is possible that the German will one day disappear from the world stage, for he has all the qualities to win heaven—but not a single one to hold his own on earth, and all nations hate him as the evil hate the good.

But if they should succeed in ousting him, a situation will arise in which they would like to scratch him out of the grave with their nails."

Christian Friedrich Hebbel
Diaries, 4 January 1860

Pro domo

The Author

*"You are too old for advice, my son,
but not for dreams!"*

My beloved father lecturing me
on the occasion of my birthday in 2008

The author, Andreas J. Voigt, was born in southern Germany in a November of the mid-1960s and has lived in Berlin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and Brandenburg since the summer of 1997.

He spent over a decade in the USA, including military school, and returned to Germany in 1984. Among other things, he was a self-employed entrepreneur, translator, restaurateur, bodyguard, and a soldier in an elite airborne long-range reconnaissance unit of the Bundeswehr. He also studied five semesters of business administration, political science, and philosophy.

For years, the *notorious* German writer, freethinker, dissident, and proud father of four has been writing short stories and publishing countless articles. The adventurer, bon vivant, *Waldgänger*, and pan-Germanic national apologist loves to travel and knows the world, but unfortunately also the world behind bars. His literary life's work, *DER NATIONALE DOPPELROMAN* from 2009, is therefore extremely striking and epochal—but above all exciting, authentic and occasionally ineffably painful.